

a field of alliums to lay in

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by [lightning_anon](#)

Summary

Ranboo's been through a lot in his short life. The foster system failed him by separating him from his sister, Niki and refusing to help him get an autism diagnosis. Sure, it was worked out eventually with support from the Watson household, but that doesn't erase the trauma that he faced. It's no surprise he's grateful to leave that chapter of his life behind him, now enjoying university and living with his best friends Tommy and Tubbo. In fact, everything seems really well.

And then he sprains his wrist.

-

Or: the obligatory sbi foster au finale, Ranboo's journey of recovered traumatic events and learning to cope with those memories.

bring it back

Chapter Summary

Ranboo, Tubbo, and Tommy are now in university. But that's the least of Ranboo's worries as he reflects on his childhood and his memory worsens.

Chapter Notes

CW: broken bones, discussion of child abuse, insecurity, memory loss/issues, dissociation, emotional distress, discussion of suicide attempts, blame, discussion of postpartum depression

Special thanks to Ari for sensitivity reading/beta-ing this chapter. You can find her at [teasdays](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Be careful," Tommy scoffs, "you're- POGGERS- gonna fall idiot.

Ranboo raises an eyebrow at him and continues to walk along the bar.

"Dude seriously, you're going to break a bone by doing that."

"Been there, done that," Ranboo says, focusing on putting one foot in front of the other and not on his own words.

"You've broken a bone before?" Tubbo asks, all curious like. Ranboo almost snorts at how perked up Tubbo gets over the topic. Of course Tubbo's curious about broken bones.

"Mhmm," Ranboo says at the same time Tommy scoffs.

"No you- Hey BITCH- you haven't," Tommy says. His head jerks up to the side.

"And how would you know that?" Ranboo challenges. He stumbles slightly on the rail, enough that Tommy throws out an arm in an aborted attempt to catch him. In the end there's no need as Ranboo quickly finds his balance and continues.

He let himself stim by humming, enjoying the vibration and how it sits in his throat, echoing down through his feet and into the rail below him.

"I've seen your medical files. Phil keeps all of ours together."

Ranboo frowns, glaring slightly at Tommy. Invasion of privacy much?

Tommy doesn't seem to care. But he does care about Ranboo breaking bones. Apparently.

"Well I have," Ranboo says, head high.

"When?"

"Well when I—" Ranboo starts, before cutting himself off with a hum as he thinks.

When had he?

How can he not remember that? Certainly he should be able to remember breaking bones?

Wait bones? He broke multiple? When?

"Ha!" Tommy gloats, "Told you."

"No," Ranboo says, "no, Tommy I have. I have and- and Tommy I've broken lots of bones."

Ranboo speaks from his heart, sincere and honest. That said, he can't back up a single word he says.

Tommy's face drops, and he looks over at Ranboo. The light in his face fades and he tilts his head slightly.

He's looking for an explanation. Ranboo can't give him one.

"I don't remember," Ranboo rushes to explain, "but I have, I know I have."

"Okay," Tommy says. His words are honest and slow, but Ranboo still feels he's being accused of something. "But wouldn't that be in your medical files?"

Well yeah, obviously it would except for the fact that it's apparently not.

"Are you sure you've actually broken a bone?" Tubbo probes, causing Ranboo to immediately bristle. Tubbo continues his thought, "Maybe you just fell really bad and it hurt a lot and that's why it's not in your records or anything."

Yeah, that could make sense.

But why- why had Ranboo been so sure?

Even so, he isn't as sure now.

"Yeah, I guess," he gives in.

"Hey," Tommy says. Ranboo looks up at him. It's so obvious he's feeling guilty about the whole thing, easily seen by how he can't make eye contact and is pulling at his fingers. Plus, his tics have increased if the consistent swallowing is anything to go by. "Hey- hey, mate, how you doin'? You doin' alright? You alright mate?- I mean maybe- hey—" Tommy takes a

breath, letting the ties pass through him before trying to speak again. "I mean maybe you did, right? Records can be wrong, yeah?"

"Yeah," Ranboo says. Even so, he knows Tommy and Tubbo don't believe that. He's not sure he believes that either.

He still checks with Niki later that night, over the phone.

"Broken a bone?" she repeats, "No. Never. At least not during the times you've lived with me."

Which had been the majority of Ranboos life, minus a few years there in the middle. A few years that had been spent in the system- where every second had been documented. Any broken bone would have certainly been noticed if it happened during the years Niki wasn't around.

"Oh," he says, last string of hope fading. And god why is he feeling hope about broken bones? "Okay then. Thanks Niki. Bye."

"W-" she starts to say, but Ranboo's already hung up.

He frowns, staring down at his desk.

He should drop it, get back to his homework, or clean his room. It's not a big deal, really.

He continues to stare at his desk.

"-and then it blew up right in his face," Tubbo describes animatedly, waving his hands in the air.

Ranboo, blinks, taking in his words.

That's when his brain catches up with him.

Wasn't he just at his desk?

What the fuck?

He stumbles to his feet, almost tripping and knocking his chair over.

He flinches away as he knocks over a glass and it shatters against the floor. He takes a few skittering steps away and tries to take a breath.

"Ranboo?" Tommy says.

Ranboo blinks. Both Tommy and Tubbo are staring at him.

"Ranboo," Tommy repeats, "are you okay?"

Ranboo takes a deep breath.

"What's going on?" he asks.

They're both silent.

"What do you mean?" Tubbo asks.

"Wh- why are we at the table?" Ranboo asks, "I was just-"

He trails off, brain working overtime.

He's at the table with Tommy and Tubbo. There's food in front of them, and when Ranboo looks to the window it's slowly getting dark outside. It's late, and this is definitely not Ranboo's room.

He doesn't remember how he got here. He doesn't remember anything since when he was staring at his desk.

He doesn't remember it at all.

That doesn't happen to him.

He forgets things, sure. Way more than the average person. He doesn't have a poor memory, he has legitimate memory issues.

Forgetting isn't unusual for him.

But this type of forgetting is.

Throughout a day, Ranboo forgets things. But right after they happen, he remembers parts, will remember getting up, making his bed, picking out cereal and eating breakfast.

Later, at lunch, he might not remember what type of cereal. But after he eats his cereal, he remembers. He remembers as he grabs his bag, as he showers. And even if he does forget, he remembers that he ate cereal, but not the type.

And on bad days, on bad days when he even forgets he ate cereal, he knows he ate breakfast.

By lunch he might not remember, but after breakfast he does.

He doesn't just... he doesn't just forget entire chunks of time.

He doesn't wake up with no memory leading up to the exact moment he's now in.

Sometimes things are fuzzy. He forgets things, doesn't know what happens.

He doesn't lose chunks of time. Not like this.

He blinks.

He's at the table, eating dinner with Tommy and Tubbo.

There's spilled water on the table and a shattered glass on the floor.

His chair is pushed away and he's stood a foot or so away.

He blinks.

He looks over at Tommy and Tubbo who are still staring at him.

They're looking at him, expecting something. An answer, an explanation. Ranboo doesn't have either. He wishes he does.

"I forgot," he says lamely.

That doesn't really help with much. Tommy and Tubbo try to be supportive, but they miss the mark. They assume he's forgotten things like he normally does and not an entire section of his day where he's suddenly jerked back to awareness.

Rambo thinks about telling them.

He doesn't.

All he can think about the fact is that he's certain he broke a bone but then again, well then again he hasn't.

He remembers- he remembers he has. But he doesn't remember the actual event of breaking any bones and it seems like nothing in his life even suggests it.

And then he sprains his wrist. Like a fucking idiot.

It seems like too much of a coincidence really. But then again there's literally a phrase for that, the Baader Heinhof phenomenon.

When your awareness of something increases, so does the occurrence.

Ranboo hadn't even known of the term but he had looked it up later with a need to know if there was a word for what he was experiencing, or if he was the only one out there experiencing these weird acts of recurrence.

It's a cool phenomenon, the autism in Ranboo's brain itching to experiment and test and form an attachment to this concept, eventually making a rabbit hole of a special interest.

But he doesn't have the time to be caught up in science. He has a mystery to solve.

Lately the only thing Ranboo's been thinking of is broken bones. And then like a dumbass he trips getting off the elevator of all things and goes careening forward. And with his height he has more of a distance to fall and-

Wow, his wrist hurts a lot.

Tubbo and Tommy come with him to the ER. It takes him over an hour to be seen so he works on his homework while he waits. After all, it was his left arm. His right arm- his dominant arm- works perfectly fine.

Tommy and Tubbo stare at him openly, wondering how the hell he can concentrate when he's so obviously in extreme pain.

Ranboo frowns.

"It makes it easier," he explains. Don't they know this? "Distracting yourself from the pain makes it so much easier to deal with."

He gets seen and they do some x-rays because how his wrist is looking is a bit concerning and they're not sure if it's a fracture, sprain, or plain broken.

When the scan comes back, the questions start.

"When did you last break your wrist?" The doctor asks.

Ranboo frowns.

"Never?" he answers. He's fairly sure that's right even though it feels wrong.

The doctor frowns at him.

"Never?" he repeats.

Ranboo nods, but can't help but feel that he's wrong.

The doctor frowns once more and then pulls an x-ray towards him.

"See those," he says as he points to a few marks on the graph. "These are all evidence of past breaks."

The picture is weird, his stark white bone with details of small gray lines and cracks running across. It's those faint lines that the doctor points out, drawing Ranboo's attention too.

"That looks like a lot," Ranboo says.

"It is," the doctor admits, "but it could be from one or two bad breaks, where there were numerous breaks in a singular incident. You really weren't aware?"

"No," Ranboo says. He then adds on, "I have memory issues- uh like diagnosed ones, so..."

"Ah, I see," the doctor says, "well, yes. It could be a few bad breaks."

The doctor doesn't continue. Ranboo can't help but feel like there's more to what he's saying.

"Or?" he asks.

The doctor hesitates.

"Well," he hedges, "well I guess the other time we see this sort of thing is in extreme abuse cases- generally one with very young children. Uh- in those cases kid's bones can fracture and break easily and also heal quickly. It isn't uncommon for many of them to occur in abusive situations."

"Oh," Ranboo says, and why can't he hear his own voice? "Oh, huh, well-"

"We're home," Tommy announces when Tubbo pulls into the driveway, as if the fact wasn't obvious.

Which maybe it wasn't, because Ranboo has no idea where he is.

"What?" he says, jolting up. His knee hits his wrist and he winces, staring at the red cast that covers his arm. When did he get that?

"Home?" Tommy repeats, "y'know like the place we live?"

The joke is unnecessary. In most situations it would be funny, but right now Ranboo is just confused.

"Huh?" he says, "when- when did we?"

Tubbo frowns at him, "You doing okay?" he asks.

Ranboo shrugs.

"Memory's doing weird stuff," he admits.

"You dissociated a bit- killed a woman- during the car ride home," Tommy admits, "think it was a bit of the pain with the meds they got you on. You're okay. You talked to the doctor, got your cast, and came- ha CUM- came out okay."

Ranboo appreciates the speed with how Tommy fills him in, it's comforting and sweet for Tommy to know him that well and to be so proactive in catching Ranboo up.

He studies his hands, thinking of what Tommy has explained to him. Ranboo remembers all that. He talked to the doctor, they did the x-ray, Ranboo got his cast, the doctor told him what not to do and what to do for the pain, and then he went home. It's a bit fuzzy, but it's there.

"Oh, okay," he mumbles, "thanks."

"What?" Tubbo asks with a frown, "repeat that?"

"Okay, thanks," Ranboo says again, much clearer.

Tubbo nods. They're all still hanging in the car.

"I'm gonna go lay down," Ranboo says, "I'm tired and my wrist hurts."

He gets noises of agreement and does so.

Ranboo stays the rest of the day in bed, and only a small part of that is because his wrist hurts. The majority of the reason is that something feels off, missing. It's like Tommy or Tubbo cranked the heat up two extra degrees, that slight difference that's so excruciating and subtle at the same time.

Ranboo feels like that, but about his words and the doctor's appointment. It makes him stim uneasily. A low hum sits in his throat as he pushes his feet up and down against the covers.

Tubbo checks on him near dinner time.

"Hey," he says, "want some pasta for dinner?"

Ranboo nods, face half buried in his pillow.

"Okay then, should be ready soon."

Tubbo turns to leave, but before he can, Ranboo calls out.

"Hey wait," he says.

Tubbo turns around with a grin and a raised eyebrow. Ranboo pulls away from the pillow so the sound of his voice isn't muffled.

"What um- we went to the doctor earlier."

It's more of a statement than a question. Tubbo answers anyway.

"Yes," he confirms, "what about it?"

"I hurt my arm," Ranboo remembers, "and they took me back, looked at it. Then we... then we..." Ranboo stares at the ground with a frown.

"You got an x-ray," Tubbo says. He walks over to Ranboo's bed, taking a seat on the corner. "And then the doctor wanted to talk to you so me and Tommy stepped out for a bit. You got a cast and some pain meds that we picked up from the pharmacy connected to the ER, and then we came home."

Ranboo nods.

Something still feels odd.

"What did you and the doctor talk about?" Tubbo asks.

Suddenly everything clicks into place.

"I don't know," Ranboo lies. It's a complete fabrication because once Tubbo asks, the memories of the discussion he had with the doctor comes flooding back in.

A few bad breaks, or a history of severe child abuse.

Ranboo knows it has to be the former. After all, there's been no evidence of child abuse at all on his history.

And yet, and yet...

He thinks he probably needs to have another talk with Niki. Maybe in person this time, he has time over the weekend when he's not in classes.

He texts Niki about coming over and she responds enthusiastically, so that becomes the plan.

That Friday afternoon, Ranboo asks Niki, "Why were we in the foster system?" as he plods down at her counter and steals a grape from the bowl next to it.

Niki blinks.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I mean, we had parents at some point. Even if I don't really remember them, I remember that. So why did we end up in the system?"

Niki stares at him for a good minute and Ranboo has the sinking feeling that he's missing something. It's a feeling he's much too used to.

"Sorry," he says, ducking his head.

Niki sighs, and extends her arms for a hug. Ranboo falls into them easily. He's always loved hugging Niki. Something about her embrace brings him back to his childhood, when she'd wrap him up tight and promise that everything would be okay, that things would get better.

And things... things have gotten better. But- but Ranboo doesn't feel okay.

"You didn't do anything wrong," she promises, "I'm just trying to figure out how to explain it all."

"You remember our parents, right?" Ranboo asks.

Niki's entire face softens and her shoulders slump. She gently pulls away, ending the hug. Ranboo aches at the absence.

"Yeah," she agrees, "yeah, I do. They um- just- it was... y'know I'm not really sure why we ended up in the system."

"What do you mean?"

Niki shrugs.

"I don't know," she says, "it's just- we seemed so normal, so happy. Things were good when I was little. And then I guess..." Niki looks at him and Ranboo has a sinking feeling. She quickly looks away and plasters a false smile on her face, "I dunno," she says again, falsely

cheery, "things changed after a bit. Mom- well she struggled with pretty severe depression. I don't know if you remember that."

Ranboo shakes his head.

Niki sighs, and nods.

"Yeah," she agrees, "yeah she spent some time in hospitals. A few suicide attempts, which were hard to say the least. And I guess Dad- well he blamed y- blamed stuff, you know? And he didn't know what to do with Mom so I guess it was easier to get rid of us then her."

Ranboo doesn't mention how she stutters over her words. He's pretty sure he knows what she was going to say anyways.

"CPS got involved, tried to figure something out so we could stay. But Mom really wasn't doing well and Dad was so focused on her that we were being neglected so we went into the foster system for a bit. It was supposed to be temporary, y'know? Just until Mom got a little better and Dad got back on his feet.

"We used to visit a lot- or I guess I did. You um, you usually didn't want to. But I got to see them at least every weekend at first, sometimes Dad would take me out on a day trip. I visited Mom in the hospital a few times, when- when she was doing better. But then one day they just disappeared."

"Disappeared?" Ranboo asks.

Niki nods.

"Maybe disappear isn't quite accurate," she says, "because CPS was vaguely in the loop. But they said it wasn't working out and everything was just making Mom worse and Dad had to prioritize her health, so..."

"So they left," Ranboo says.

Niki nods.

"They left because of me," Ranboo notes.

"No," Niki instantly jumps on, "no, no, Ranboo of course not."

Nii's voice is sincere, sweet as honey. She can believe every word she says. Even so, Ranboo knows her words are a lie.

Ranboo raises an eyebrow.

"Mom was depressed because of me," Ranboo says, "wasn't she? I made her depressed, I made her want to kill herself. And Dad blamed me for it."

Niki hesitates. She hesitates. That's all Ranboo needs.

His face crumples even as he does his best to hide all evidence of emotion on it.

"Oh, no no no, Ranboo it's- well it- Mom had some form of postpartum depression, yeah? And that wasn't your fault. It wasn't your fault Mom was so sad and Dad shouldn't have blamed you, okay?"

"Okay," Ranboo says. For someone so tall his words sound so small. He wonders if Niki believes him. He certainly doesn't believe himself.

Ranboo has one more question.

"Did- did our parents ever hit us?" Ranboo asks, because he has to. He has to know.

"No," Niki gasps, "of course not."

"I- are you sure?" Ranboo asks.

"Yes," Niki says firmly.

Ranboo nods and carries on. He knows when not to push a topic. This is definitely one of those times.

He wonders when and where he learned that particular skill and why wondering about it gives him a sinking feeling in his chest.

He calls Amelia that same night. He's only talked to his past social worker a few times since his permanent move back to Niki's was fully settled.

"Ranboo," she greets, "Hi, how are you?"

"Hi Amelia," Ranboo sighs heavily.

"That bad, huh?"

"Sorry."

"No it's okay, I get it. What has you calling me?"

"Uh- I was hoping I could get any information- like my files- that the system has."

"Yeah of course," Amelia agrees, "But it might take me a bit. You know if you need them immediately, you could ask Niki, she-"

"No," Ranboo interrupts.

He pales when he realizes that he interrupted her.

"Sorry," he stumbles out, "Sorry I didn't mean to- sorry I- gosh I- just- heh I don't even know what I'm saying anymore or why I'm asking. Actually, second thought, second thought it's

fine. You're right I can get the files from Niki, and really I don't even actually need the files at all so it's okay, y'know? It's- thanks anyway Amelia. Appreciate it."

"Hey, hey Ranboo wait," Amelia tries to soothe, but Ranboo's already hung up.

He lets his phone fall down at his side and something in him feels heavy and strange. He sees his hands shake in front of him, but can't quite see them. His body trembles, but he doesn't feel it. He feels something in him tighten and get smaller.

Distantly, he recognizes something's wrong. If he paid attention to that part of himself he'd recognize the creeping feeling of dissociation. If he paid attention he'd notice the creeping strangeness and the fact that he's never felt dissociating like this before.

But he doesn't notice any of that.

How could he when he doesn't notice anything besides the trembling in his hands?

There's a noise- something distant that Ranboo doesn't notice- and then movement on his bed. He continues to stare at his trembling hands as something twists inside of him, forcing him to duck his head and want everything to end.

There's a noise at his side and Ranboo wants to pay attention to it, he does, but all he can do is curl up smaller and let the figure at his side gently pull him into his side.

Ranboo begins to cry as the figure holds him, pulling up his hands to his face and doing his best to breathe. He just wants to be held and comforted and treated- treated like-

Ranboo feels so small right now, with trembling hands and a heart that aches.

He wishes for it to end.

The next morning he wakes up with a slight rash under his eyes, no one at his side, and an email in his inbox from Amelia titled 'sorry about the other day' with the attached file Ranboo-History.pdf.

Chapter End Notes

Exciting news! Along with this chapters release is the official release of encompass: behind the scenes, starting with [Encompass Q&A](#) as well as the [encompass: the sandbox](#). I'd love of you checked them out.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[Encompass Sandbox Project](#): The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

spoon-fed

Chapter Summary

Ranboo dissociates, forgets, and remembers. He also restarts therapy. And goes to the hospital. And watches Gravity Falls.

Chapter Notes

CW: mentions of self-harm, memory loss/issues/confusion, non-graphic suicide attempt, discussion of suicide attempt, discussion of inpatient care, child abuse, belief oneself is going to die, extreme panic, dissociation, throwing up, CPR

Special thanks to Ari for sensitivity reading/beta-ing this chapter. You can find her at [teasdays](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo uses a lot of wet wipes. And hand sanitizer. And dry shampoo. And really he uses a lot of ways to stay clean that don't involve water.

But back to the wet wipes. Wet wipes are great! Ranboo's always hated the feeling of pretty much anything on his hands since forever and wet wipes give him the relief he needs from awful textures.

Really, Ranboo could be a wet wipes spokesperson.

He swears by them. And usually- he usually gets the same brand. He doesn't actually know if it's better than any other brand but he started buying it and now it's just a habit to get the same brand every time.

But they hadn't had the right brand last time he went to the store.

It's harder now to find the wet wipes he's looking for with the whole 'eco friendly' push. Great in theory but it means that the ones packed full of- fairly safe- chemicals are harder to find in light of the '99.9% water mixed with a drop of fruit extract' movement. He doesn't exactly want to wipe his hands with clorox but that's looking more and more likely.

But that's not the point.

The point is that this is a different type of wet wipe and Ranboo's pretty sure they're leaving him with a rash. Or, the opposite of a rash actually. They do leave him with a vague itching

sensation, but such is to be expected. They do have some water content after all.

But he's also getting this weird... whitish stuff on his hands. He thinks. If he looks hard enough under the right light.

Or maybe he's going crazy, he's probably going crazy.

"Dude, what are you doing?" Tommy snorts, hovering at Ranboo's door. Ranboo looks at him and then back at his hands from where he's standing in the middle of his room quite randomly.

"Uh..." Ranboo says, "Good question."

Tommy snorts.

"I think the wet wipes I got are giving me a rash."

"Oh shit, really," Tommy says, walking in and taking one of Ranboo's hands gently in his own.

Ranboo's breath catches and he does his best to not rip his hand away as his heart flutters deceptively for no reason. His body is tense and tight and he's suddenly so scared but has no idea why.

Tommy gently flips his hand over and then back again. Suddenly he jerks his hands up, rapidly, high fiving Ranboo with a tic.

"Sorry," Tommy mumbles. "I don't see anything," he notes. Tommy then pulls his focus back to Ranboo's face instead of his hands.

"Hey, you okay?" he asks, frowning as he meets Ranboo's eyes.

"Yeah," Ranboo says, "Sorry, I dunno, brain doing weird shit."

"Yeah," Tommy says, giving him an odd look.

They both pause, looking at each other for a moment.

"You doing alright?" Tommy asks. Ranboo tries to compute the question, figuring out what makes this one different from the one Tommy had just asked.

"In general," Tommy clarifies, "Overall, are you- POGGERS, pog- you- pog- are you good?"

Ranboo tilts his head slightly, looking into Tommy's eyes for whatever thoughts are burrowed behind in his head.

Well that's sure a thought. Ranboo needs to get some more sleep.

"Yeah," Ranboo says, "yeah I'm good."

“You sure?” Tommy asks, “You- uh you seemed to have a- hey, hey little bitch boy- have a rough night last tonight.”

Ranboo blinks.

“How do you know about that?”

“Probably because I was there,” Tommy chuckles, “You know- your pillow while you sobbed- like a little bitch boy- shit sorry, and all.”

Ranboo gets a faint memory of laying onto someone, breaking apart last night.

“Oh. That was you?”

“Mhmm,” Tommy agrees. Ranboo blinks.

The world feels fuzzy again.

“Hey you want a hug?” Tommy answers. Ranboo gives a small nod and Tommy takes a step forward to wrap the taller boy up in his arms and hold him close. Ranboo feels so much smaller curled up in Tomy’s arms like this. Warm, and safe, and god why had he been afraid of Tommy’s hand just a second ago?

“I’m a bit worried about you,” Tommy admits, “You’ve just seemed- I dunno- and last night- I guess I’m just worried.”

Ranboo shrugs.

“I’m okay,” he insists, “Dunno just-” he shrugs. Tommy’s shoulders shrug as well, an unconscious tic mirroring Ranboo’s own behavior. Ranboo tries to stop shrugging as much.

Tommy gives him another look.

“Alright,” he says, “just let me know, yeah?”

Ranboo nods.

“Okay. I was just saying hi and to remind you that we’re going to lunch later with Tubbo, yeah? After my class.”

“Oh right!” Ranboo says, “I remember!”

“Okay cool, one or both of us will text you again later when you should probably head out, and we’ll all meet there. I- just, just killed- I have class and Tubbo has-”

“Work, yup,” Ranboo nods, “yeah I’ll see you there.”

“Alright, bye.”

“Good luck with chem,” Ranboo calls after him. Tommy gives him the middle finger as he leaves the room.

As soon as he's out the door, Ranboo opens the file attached to the email he received from Amelia.

It's... well it's a lot. A lot as in over fifty pages of information.

Good god, what is all of this? Why is it so long?

Ranboo begins to scroll through and quickly learns exactly why it is so long. It's because it really does chronicle Ranboo's entire life. From the hospital he was born in to the first CPS report to being separated from Niki from the suspicion of his autism to each home he was in and every school transcript he's ever had. Suddenly the fifty plus pages don't seem to be quite enough. Can his whole life really be quantified by all this? Can it be quantified by about 3 pages for every year he's lived?

He begins to read more thoroughly. It takes him hours.

It's everything that Ranboo could possibly want to know about himself.

Everything except if he was abused.

He pushes away from his desk when he finishes the last page with a frustrated huff. He's not even sure why he's asking that question, why he's so determined to know.

Niki said that their parents weren't abusive. Ranboo looks down at his wrapped wrist. It should have just been a few bad breaks. Nothing to point to abuse. He glances at his phone, realizes the time, and realizes he's going to be late for lunch with Tommy and Tubbo.

He sighs, shakes his head, and does his best to momentarily forget about this entire mess. Momentarily that is, because really he did spend hours reading all of that, he doesn't want to do that all again. At least he pulled up a google doc part of the way through to highlight the most important pieces of the document for him to revise later.

But for now it's time for his lunch.

He grabs his bag, shutting the document, and heads off. Or at least he thinks he does. He begins to dissociate sometime after closing his computer and doesn't really get a clear grasp of the world again until he meets up with Tubbo and Tommy. And even then, it's only a small blink of awareness before the tide pulls him back under. He drifts back into the cloudy land of dissociation.

"Ranboo? Hey, hey Ranboo?" Tubbo's saying.

"Huh, what?" Ranboo says. He's startled abruptly out of dissociating, looking back up and across the table and at Tubbo.

"You good?" Tubbo asks.

Ranboo groans.

"Ye," he insists, "Why do you keep asking me that?"

“I mean this is my first time asking that, but go off I guess,” Tubbo mutters.

“Okay well-”

“And you’re literally hurting yourself again,” Tubbo points out.

Ranboo scoffs, because what is Tubbo talking about-

Oh Tubbo’s probably talking about the apparent bandages on his arms. What the fuck, when did those get there?

The one's on his left are balanced around his cast oddly, wrapped lower than the ones of the right until they just brush Ranboo's cast on one end, and reach his elbow on the other.

But more importantly-

"Well Tommy was literally bugging me about if I was okay earlier today but go off I guess," Ranboo mimics Tubbo’s tone.

He doesn't know why he's being difficult and rude. He really doesn't. He just... well he really has no idea why he's doing it.

He feels vaguely ill.

"No I wasn't," Tommy protests.

"Uh, yeah you were," Ranboo argues, pulling his arms close to him and doing his best not to scratch at his bandaged arms, “We talked about how I dissociated last night. And I thought I was the one with memory issues.”

His joke doesn’t land, instead Tubbo and Tommy share a look and stare at him.

Ranboo vaguely feels like he’s done something wrong, curling into himself.

“I wasn’t trying to bug you about anything,” Tommy promises, “I was just worried. I’m sorry.”

That only makes Ranboo feel worse. He didn’t mean to make Tommy guilty. He’s just frustrated and doesn't know why. But that doesn’t mean he can be rude to Tommy about it. Tommy doesn’t deserve his frustration.

“Sorry,” Ranboo apologizes and dips his head. For the first time he notices that there's a sandwich in front of him. It has pickles on it. Ranboo doesn’t even really like pickles. Why’d he get pickles?

“My dissociation's been worse lately,” Ranboo admits, “Dunno why. It’s scary though.”

“Yeah,” Tubbo validates.

“It-” Ranboo starts, then sighs, “It can be scary when I wake up and realize I’ve hurt myself without knowing it. The forgetting I can handle, but the not being aware of hurting myself...”

He does his best not to meet Tommy and Tubbo’s eyes. He knows they wouldn’t pity him, instead be understanding. But he also knows they’re going to be concerned. Which is something Ranboo does not have the energy to deal with.

He also doesn’t mention that right now is one of those times when he has no memory of hurting himself.

“Have you thought about maybe going back to therapy?” Tubbo suggests.

Ranboo shrugs, but can’t deny that the idea sticks to him. He opens his bag and digs through it for a minute to find a familiar notebook, pulling it out. He makes a note in his memory book about revisiting therapy. Tubbo gives him a soft smile as he does so. From Tommy, he gets a thumbs up.

He’s not really sure how to get a new therapist, so he calls Niki. Niki’s awesome because of course she is and somehow gets him set up with an appointment in two weeks. Which is pretty damn good considering it can be really hard to find a therapist these days.

Ranboo thanks her profressly and Niki just reminds her that this is what she's here for. Ranboo's so lucky to have her in his life.

It had been hard moving out after only getting to live with her for a year, but it was best for Ranboo. And he really loves living with Tubbo and Tommy. Plus, school has been really great!

Ranboo hadn’t been a big fan, but university is so much better and so different. He loves his classes. He’s even thinking about going down the route of psychology. Or maybe architecture. Really, he doesn’t know it all sounds so interesting.

Niki always loves listening to him talk about school.

Ranboo continues to thank her profusely for the therapist appointment and she promises it's no problem and that it's her job to help him.

Ranboo smiles, and nods.

Two weeks pass fast. Ranboo pretends he’s just busy and not because his memory is worse than ever and that he’s losing large chunks of time in a way he never has before.

His first therapy session is pretty average. A lot of it is review, getting some family history and basic stuff, getting to know his therapist as well as getting a baseline for why Ranboo’s here and what he’s hoping to get from it.

Ranboo thinks it goes pretty decent all things considered.

His second therapy session is when they start to the y'know, actual therapizing and stuff. Ranboo's not quite sure that’s the right word for it.

"Let's talk about your childhood home," his therapist explains, "what was the floor like?"

Ranboo opens his eyes, even though she's asked him to close them.

"What?" he asks, "the- what?"

"The floor," she repeats, "was it carpet, hardwood, tile?"

Ranboo closes his eyes again and thinks.

"Uh, carpet," he says, "and linoleum. But mostly carpet. My room had carpet, it was a weird beige green color."

"Alright, good. What else do you remember about your room?"

"I had a desk," Ranboo recalls, "it uh- there was a Spiderman toy on it."

"Very good," she praises.

"The walls are cream and the- the door creaks."

"The door creaks."

"Uh huh," Ranboo says, visualizing himself in his child body on his bed, "it does. It's helpful."

"How is it helpful?"

"Gives me a few more seconds to prepare," Ranboo explains. He doesn't notice how his nails begin to dig into his palms.

"Prepare for what?"

"My dad," he mutters, "he um- he comes into my room."

"And what does he do?"

"He um- he's bad, he's-"

Ranboo trails off and all he can see is the beige walls of his childhood room. But that's not right because his eyes are closed and he shouldn't see anything.

"Your mom attempted suicide again," his dad grunts, storming into his room, and Ranboo is right there on his bed. "She's suffering. And you did this to her."

"I'm sorry," Ranboo says, ducking his head down and studying the sheets of his bed. "Is she okay?"

"Is she- is she okay? They had to do CPR. They broke her ribs so she could live, do you- do you know how much that has to hurt?"

Ranboo shakes his head.

"Come here," his dad says, "and I'll show you."

Ranboo shakes his head.

"Dad no," he pleads, "no please, no thank you, I don't wanna."

But his dad manhandles him anyways, ignoring Ranboo's desperate cries and lays him flat on his bed. And then he begins to press down on his chest.

Ranboo chokes out a sob and instantly regrets it as his father's hands bury deeper and leave him gasping for air.

"Please," he harshly whispers, but the hands keep pushing and pushing and pushing.

Until suddenly they release. Ranboo gasps for air, breathing in deeply and ending off with a deep series of coughs.

It's over. Thank god it's over.

And then his dad starts pressing again.

This time Ranboo doesn't sob, doesn't beg. He learned last time he loses more air that way.

The pressure continues and continues and continues until Ranboo's pretty sure he hears something crack.

The hands release.

They only release for a moment before pressing down again and again and god Ranboo's so dizzy and his lips are feeling numb and why can't he feel his toes?"

"Please," he begs, "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to hurt Mommy."

He knows begging would just make it worse, have him lose oxygen he so desperately needs. But he's so tired and he can't think straight so he begs and begs like his life depends on it.

And maybe it does.

Ranboo's pretty sure he passes out at some point. Or maybe he just forgets the rest. Either way, his father leaves, and he lives.

He lives.

But does he really?

Ranboo gasps loudly as his entire body shakes with all the force of the past.

"Breathe Ranboo, breathe," his therapist said, "you need to breathe."

Ranboo gives an awkward nod and tries to do so. His therapist writes something on her clipboard. Why is it so hard to breathe?

His own hands grasp at his chest and for a second he can feel his father's right below his own. Seconds later, the feeling is gone and he can breathe clearly once again.

He ends up at home eventually and the second he walks in the door, Tubbo and Tommy are looking up.

He barely hears Tommy say his name and then Ranboo's sprinting for the bathroom.

He collapses to his knees in front of the toilet and retches, emptying his stomach of all of its contents and maybe even more. He throws up in waves, never stopping even when a soft hand rubs circles on his back and another hand pulls back his hair.

He keeps throwing up even when there's nothing left to throw up and instead he's just dry heaving into their probably gross toilet.

He can't stop. It doesn't stop. Why won't it stop?

It's a lot and in the week that follows it hangs with him and he goes back to therapy feeling... well he feels that...

Therapy is going great!

It really really is, that's what Ranboo definitely thinks for sure.

It's the third session now and sure the second session was pretty rough but this third one is going a lot better. They don't talk about his dad, or his parents, and really Ranboo's not sure if they talk about anything at all.

If they do, be sure doesn't remember.

But haha right there goes silly Ranboo forgetting stuff as usual.

So therapy's going great and he's making a lot of progress!

Progress in what he's not really sure.

Maybe progress in ending up in the hospital because that sure happened and Ranboo has no idea why!

But here he is anyways, in a bed with scratchy sheets and an absurd amount of beeping to go with it.

What's he doing in the hospital?

Niki's at his bedside which- hey, that doesn't make sense, Niki doesn't live here. People don't live in hospitals. Including Ranboo. What's he doing in the hospital?

"What are you doing here?" he asks.

She just sobs at his words.

Behind Niki is Phil.

Phil? What is Phil doing here? That's even more odd than Niki being here.

"What are you doing here? Ranboo repeats again, this time towards Phil and with much more confusion.

"Hi mate," Phil says, "you alright?"

"No," Ranboo tells him plainly, an observer to his own situation. "I'm in a hospital apparently. That's not good."

Niki cries harder.

"Why am I here?" Ranboo asks.

Niki cries harder and god, why is she doing that? Why is she here? What's going on? Ranboo doesn't remember.

"Ranboo," Phil explains, firm yet gentle in that way only he can manage, "you tried to kill yourself."

"No I didn't," Ranboo immediately refutes.

Because that makes no sense, why would he try to kill himself? He likes being alive even if it can be hard sometimes. Being alive is much better than being not-alive.

He didn't try to kill himself. He wouldn't try to kill himself.

This isn't making much sense at all.

Niki continues to cry and pulls away from his bed.

"I-" she sobs, "I don't-"

"Take a walk," Phil suggests, "hey Ranboo, you like sprite, right?"

Ranboo nods.

"Niki, want to get Ranboo a sprite?"

Niki nods- frantic and deranged- hair flying as she pulls away from the hospital bed and leaves the room.

"You tried to kill yourself," Phil says, "this is the fifth time I'm telling you that. You keep forgetting. The doctors will probably want to talk to you again soon. It's fairly likely you will have to go to an inpatient facility for a few days."

At that news, Ranboo sits straight up in bed. As he does he notices the new bandages on his forearms. Once again, the ones on his broken wrist are wrapped oddly around his cast, almost like they cradle it.

Oh yikes, he tried to go out that way, huh?

Part of it surprises him because hey- not exactly like he was planning a suicide attempt here. But another part of him isn't surprised at all.

Something snaps in him firm and hard and Ranboo blinks and sees the room clearly for the first time since he woke up.

"I can't," Ranboo says, "Phil- Phil I can't go to an inpatient facility I-"

"Okay, hey, hey, breathe," Phil reminds, "breathe. One step at a time mate."

Ranboo gulps for air.

"Why can't you?" Phil says.

"Because-" Ranboo gasps, "because- frick, my mom- and I can't- and it won't be- you can't make me I'm an adult and you can't make me and I can't go you can't."

"Hey, hey, hey," Phil comforts, "let's slow down. Why can't you?"

"I just-"

"No, think about it," Phil encourages, "why can't you?"

"I think I'm turning into my mom," Ranboo says, "I can't turn into my mom."

"Ranboo this-"

"Did they take x-rays of my chest?" Ranboo asks abruptly.

"No," Phil frowns, "no you- you slit your wrists there was no reason to get x-rays of your chest. Why?"

"I think my dad broke my ribs as a kid..I was hoping they could check and tell."

"R-"

"Hey am I on pain meds?" Ranboo asks, "I feel like I'm on pain meds. Everything's all," he waves his hand around as if that explains anything.

Phil blinks for a moment too long and brings his hands together.

"No," he says, "no, Ranboo. You're not on pain meds."

"Oh. Huh."

That's when the tears start to roll down his face.

"Phil?" He says.

"Yeah?"

"You can't tell Niki about our dad."

Ranboo doesn't give Phil the chance to respond before he speaks again.

"I didn't want to die y'know," Ranboo says, "I don't want to die. It just happened."

"Okay mate," Phil whispers.

"You don't believe me," Ranboo says.

Phil sighs and shrugs.

"I don't know," he says, "I just- I don't know Ranboo. Would you believe yourself?"

Yes is what Ranboo wants to say. He wants to say yes because it's true. He wants- he's doing well. He didn't want to hurt himself. He doesn't know why he did this.

But how does he explain this?

He doesn't end up in inpatient care. He's given numerous forms to fill out by the doctors and it's a close but all of his psych evaluations look good. Sure he's depressed, anxious, autistic, and has memory issues. But there's nothing indicating that he's suicidal.

He gets to go home.

Niki tries to talk to him.

Ranboo's not sure he wants to.

He's hurt himself a lot in the past and it's something he struggles with. He's addicted to it and while he's broken that addiction now it's a habit he can still fall into when he dissociates. He doesn't mean to, but it happens.

But he's never tried to kill himself.

It still doesn't feel quite real.

Tubbo and Tommy are concerned of course.

His therapist is... is less so.

Or, Ranboo thinks she's probably concerned but she seems more focused on progress and the fact that Ranboos is actively looking into the fact that his father probably abused him.

"It's good," she says, "it's important to know and address your trauma."

So why does Ranboo feel like he's getting worse?

He also thinks that weird rash on his hands is coming back. And it seems to be spreading. The white on his hands is growing, moving from between his fingers to his joints as well. It's a little scary.

It doesn't hurt, or itch, but he doesn't know what's wrong and that's scary.

He doesn't know what's wrong and that's scary.

He's scared.

Not knowing what else to do, he grabs the thick weighted blanket at the foot of his bed, throws it around his shoulders and stumbles out of his room.

He stumbles because it's heavy, okay? Thing's twenty pounds and sure he's tall but he has limp noodle arms and he's allowed to stumble slightly under the weight of the blanket.

He pads to the main room, finding Tubbo next to him in the living room watching something while doing something on his computer.

"Hi," Tubbo says as he stumbles in. "One with the pressure stim?"

Ranboo nods, and forgoes the kitchen to sit on the couch next to Tubbo.

"How are your wrists?" Tubbo asks, and Ranboo looks down at his still bandaged arms. He changed the bandages this morning and well- they're definitely going to scar. But hey, Ranboo's already seeing them starting to heal.

"P'etty good," he mumbles, "healin' good."

"Didn't catch that," Tubbo says, "did you say good?"

Ranboo nods again.

"You doing alright?" Tubbo asks. Ranboo knows this is much more about him than his arms.

"Yeah," I think so," he says, tearing away from the blanket and working on not mumbling so Tubbo can understand him better, "I dunno, is it weird that it's just not a big deal to me."

Tubbo hesitates, then shrugs.

"I guess it's just- I don't remember it, y'know? And I had no intention of killing myself and I don't want to die and I'm not suicidal."

"And yet you tried to kill yourself?"

"But did I though?" Ranboo points out, "Was I really? I don't know. I guess it's like my self harm, y'know? It's not something I'm actively doing. And if it's not me doing it and it's

dissociated me doing it like- I dunno obviously it's a problem and we need to make sure it doesn't happen again, right? But I'm genuinely okay. And I'm in therapy. We'll figure it out."

"Okay," Tubbo says, "I'm glad."

"I dunno, I kinda just want things to be normal again."

"Normal how?"

"C'n we watch Gravity Falls?" Ranboo asks, "Together?"

"Yes," Tubbo immediately agrees, picking up the remote and stopping whatever's running, going back to Disney Plus.

"Gross, capitalism," Ranboo complains with a groan.

Tubbo snorts and selects the series. It's in his recently watched, which is no surprise. It's Tubbo's favorite show and one he's been working on getting Ranboo to watch for months now.

Tubbo curls into his side as the opening credits start up and Ranboo pulls him close, wrapping the heavy blanket around them both. It's perfect.

Though Ranboo does vaguely wish he was the little spoon.

Chapter End Notes

and things get worse.

boy do they get worse.

bit of a last minute update bc i planned to update tmrw but realized i couldnt a half hour ago.

REMINDER: the launch of encompass: behind the scenes is here!

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[Encompass Sandbox Project](#): The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

[encompass: the sandbox](#): encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

[encompass: behind the scenes](#): an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the

scenes content.

Motions and Commotions

Chapter Summary

Ranboo calls Niki. It doesn't go as plan. Many more things don't go as planned. Things are not planned. Things are not going well.

Chapter Notes

CW: discussion/memories of child abuse, unintentional gaslighting, miscommunication, invalidation, indiscernable reality, dissociation, derealization, memory issues/problems/loss, self worth issues, shame and guilt, feelings of betrayal, feelings of inadequacy

Special thanks to Ari for sensitivity reading/beta-ing this chapter. You can find her at [teasdays](#).

Special thanks to the Star System (specifically encompass fictives Techno, Ranboo, and Niki) for sensitivity reading/beta-ing this chapter. You can find them at [St4rch1ld](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo wakes up unable to breathe. He has a vague memory in his head of hands pushing down on his chest painfully- harder and harder until he can no longer think. But then he awakes and he still can't breathe and then he can and then he can't.

He can't do this anymore. He can't.

It's five am and Ranboo's calling Niki. He'd feel bad about the time usually, but to be completely honest he's not even aware of the time himself, his eyes barely noting the number as fingers fumble for her contact.

"Ranboo," she says, voice hoarse and full of sleep, "What- Why are you calling?"

"I'm pretty sure Dad abused me," he blurts out.

"What-"

"I- I fractured my wrist, right? And then I went to the doctor and he said that it had signs of being broken before. Like a lot of signs. He said that either I had broken it really bad a couple of times or that it was the result of severe child abuse. He said they don't see breaks like the ones I have very often and it's generally in child abuse cases when the kids are really little.

The bones are a lot more fragile and they break really easy but also heal really easy. And then- and then in therapy I've been working with my therapist-"

And okay, sure Ranboo sort of feels like the therapy is making him worse, but his therapist still has a point-

"And we did this trauma exercise and I- Niki I remembered something from my childhood! I did!" Which in of itself is sort of insane, Ranboo remembering something like that, from so long ago when he's never been able to remember those things before.

"But- well I was in my room and Dad came in and he said Mom tried to kill herself again and that they did CPR and then he started to press down on my chest really, really hard and I think- I think I even heard something break? And I'm pretty sure I passed out and I also think this probably happened more than once and I think- well that combined with- with the thing with my wrist. I think it's possible- no, no likely that- I mean Dad- it makes sense if-"

"Ranboo," Niki says, cutting off his stream of disconjoined words, "Ranboo."

Ranboo stops, taking a harsh breath as he tries to get air back from his rambling. His breath hitches, and he coughs.

"Ranboo, Dad didn't abuse you," she says, "I don't- I don't know what you think, what you remember, but that's not what happened. You weren't abused."

"I- uh," Ranboo says, "I... well I wasn't exactly asking you?" he half heistates, cringing a bit on the way he sounds. That's not what he meant to say, but well it kind of is. He's really bad at doing this whole socializing thing.

"I know you said we weren't abused," Ranboo says, "But I've been thinking, you were in school, right? You couldn't have been around all the time. I think- well I'm gonna see if I can get a chest x-ray or something. Maybe they can find something there like in my wrists. Just thought it'd be good to see, right? There's no harm."

Niki doesn't seem to hear his words, because the minute he finishes she's brushing over what he said and going to comfort him instead. But Ranboo doesn't need comfort, he needs answers.

"Ranboo, hey, I know things are probably hard right now. Y'know, with everything that happened-"

"You mean my suicide attempt."

Which, okay, was it really a suicide attempt if Ranboo didn't mean to do it? If he wasn't aware he was doing it?

Ranboo doesn't think of it as a suicide attempt. But he knows others still do.

They just don't get it, they don't get what it's like to not be aware or in control of your body like he is.

Niki thinks it's a suicide attempt. Ranboo knows she does.

Niki hesitates.

"Yeah," she whispers, "yeah that. It's just- look this is all really quick. I told you, you weren't abused. There was nothing indicating that. And even if CPS didn't notice anything, I would have. Sure I had school but you're my little brother. Plus with Dad being so busy with Mom- I would have known. There's no way I couldn't have known. And, I mean, I know you don't remember it all, anyways, so how could you possibly- I mean you know you have memory issues-"

"Just because I have memory issues doesn't mean it didn't happen," Ranboo bites back, "And yeah Niki, I'm pretty aware of the fact that I have memory issues."

"Ranboo, I'm not saying-"

"And- and- and why do I have memory issues, anyways, huh? Cause no one really knows. They thought maybe it was something physical right? But there was no evidence of brain trauma. But, well, being suffocated like Dad suffocated me-"

"He didn't-"

"Like dad suffocated me," Ranboo pushes through, steamrolling Niki's protests, "that could deprive my brain of oxygen probably, right? That could cause memory issues, right? And- and even if it didn't the other thought was trauma, memory issues from trauma except well, except I didn't have trauma right? Sure the foster system's rough on everyone but I had memory issues going into the system, so it had to be before and- and- and- well this could be that trauma, right? So- physical, mental- either this could be an explanation, y'know? Why I have the memory issues I do, right?"

Niki's soft breathing is the only thing Ranboo hears from the other side of the line for a solid few minutes.

"Ranboo," she soothes, "Ranboo, is that what this is about?"

"What?" Ranboo asks, genuinely a bit lost. Didn't he make it clear that this was about him most likely almost definitely having been abused? What does Niki think about this? Wait, does she think that this is about-

"Your memory loss and issues," Niki says, "Look- I can't imagine how hard it is not having a reason but-"

"No," Ranboo says, ice running through his veins, "No. No, don't do this to me. Not you. No- Niki."

He doesn't- Ranboo can't do this. Niki can't be doing this to him.

"I know it has to be hard but that doesn't mean that you were abused. You're looking for an explanation that's not there, so it makes sense that this is what you would land on, I understand that but it's not-"

“No,” Ranboo says, lip quivering. He tries to stabilize his shaky breath. “No. Niki you- you can’t- this isn’t- I swear if you’re gonna gaslight me.”

“That’s not even funny,” Niki snaps back immediately, “That’s not- I’m not gaslighting you, Ranboo. How could you say that? All I’m saying is-”

“No- I can’t- I can’t do this,” Ranboo decides.

“Ranboo-” Niki calls, but Ranboo’s already clicking the red end call button on his phone.

He’s still shaky, some vague part of him recognizing that as well as the cloudy feeling filling his head. It’s still too early in the morning, but he- he’s scared and he needs someone so he exits his room and heads towards-

Tubbo and Tommy are already in the hall.

“What?” Ranboo says, “I- what?”

“Niki called,” Tommy says. And when did she have time to do that? Ranboo just got off the phone with her.

That was just a few seconds ago, right? Or did he lose time again?

Nothing feels real anymore.

Nothing feels real. Nothing feels real. Nothing feels real.

Is Ranboo real?

“Ranboo, let’s- we could sit down?” Tubbo proposes, and that’s when Ranboo realizes. Not them too. Not- no- they can’t.

Do they believe Niki?

Do they think Ranboo’s lying too, making things up?

No, they can’t, they can’t.

But here they are anyway.

Ranboo shatters.

“Niki- I’m not- she thinks-” and then with the most heartbroken, shattered vocals Ranboo can manage, “How could you?”

He doesn’t wait for an answer, instead darting back to his room and grabbing his backpack next to the floor. Within a minute he’s out the door, with only half of mind to where he’s going.

The last time he ran away like this- when Phil was fostering him- he went to Niki. But this time, he can’t do that. Instead he goes to where he originally ran from.

He goes to Phil.

Except it's not Phil that opens the door. It's Fundy.

"Fundy," A voice calls from further in, "What've we said about the door?"

The toddler looks up at him, then back inside, then back to him

"WANBOO!" Fundy then shouts and runs at him, jumping and expecting to be caught.

Ranboo panics and fails to catch the kid. The toddler falls to the ground with a verbal 'oomph' sound and immediately starts screaming and crying.

Ranboo panics.

"Oh my- oh no, Fundy, sorry kiddo are you okay? Hey, hey, it's alright?"

But Fundy pays him no attention, and continues to cry. Ranboo continues to fumble with what to do. Should he pick the kid up?

Moments later, Wilbur appears in the door and crouches next to his son, saving Ranboo from his indecision.

"Can I pick you up sweetheart?" Wilbur asks. Fundy continues to cry as he raises his short, stubby arms in the direction of his father. Wilbur scoops him up and settles him on his hip.

"Hey sweetheart, it's okay honey. Are you okay? What happened?"

Fundy stops screaming and moves to sniffles before driving his snot-covered face into Wilbur's chest.

"He uh- he jumped up at me," Ranboo says, "I didn't catch her- him. I am so, so sorry."

Ranboo stumbles a little on Fundy's pronouns, but is proud of how quickly he catches himself. Memory issues and changing pronouns make a little bit of a mess in his brain, but he's doing his best. Fundy deserves it. Every trans person deserves it. So Ranboo will do his best, and then better.

But pronouns aside, hopefully Wilbur doesn't hate him for not catching his infant son.

"Fundy, did you jump at Ranboo without asking?"

Fundy nods.

"Okay kiddo, see this is what can happen. Ranboo wasn't ready, so you fell. That's why it's important to ask, okay?"

Fundy nods again, still sniffing.

"Okay," Wilbur says, "But that's okay, you made a mistake and that happens. And you're okay. Look, you have a few scrapes. They might hurt a little bit and it's okay to cry, but the

good news is that you'll feel better soon and Daddy is right here, okay?"

"Yeah," Fundy sniffles, "Sowwy Wanboo, not you faults."

Something in Ranboo sinks and then shrinks.

"Is okay," Ranboo says, "Uh, I shoulda caught you."

"It's really okay," Wilbur confirms, "Fundy needs to learn boundaries, and no one's seriously hurt."

Ranboo gives a small nod, accepting Wilbur's words.

Even so, he still feels the faint twinges of guilt.

"Uh, come in," Wilbur says, scooching past the door and holding it open with his feet as his hands are still full of his son, "And- not that we mind of course- but why are you here?"

"Is Phil home?"

"Yeah," Wilbur says as he shifts Fundy on his hip. "You all good?"

"Y'know, I really wish people would stop asking me that?" Ranboo huffs, irrationally frustrated over Wilbur's words.

"Huh, I get that," Wilbur says, and nods him in.

Ranboo huffs and shuffles past.

"Y'know people keep asking you that because they care," Wilbur says.

"Well I wish they'd stop."

"Stop asking, or stop caring?"

Ranboo doesn't know how to answer that. Is both an acceptable response?

"Look- they're trying to help. And obviously, the way they're going about it isn't helping. But they are trying. That doesn't mean it doesn't make things hard for you- it's, I dunno, it's important to remember sometimes."

Ranboo wants to answer but he's pretty sure that sometime in the past when his father crushed his ribs and lungs between his hands he may have also crushed his windpipe because he now finds it impossible to breathe.

Trauma jokes. Fun times.

"Phil's upstairs," Wilbur tells him after he stays silent. "Just knock on his door."

Ranboo nods, and moves for the stairs, placing his hand on the rail as he treks up. He hits a small groove at one point, fingers sliding in it. He huffs at the small notch.

Tommy had done that. He had been throwing something, Ranboo thinks- he doesn't quite remember the details. Tubbo was supposed to catch it, but it hit the stairs instead.

Tommy had been scared shitless. For a kid who hadn't really been abused- more neglected- he had been so terrified of Phil.

He had apologized profusely, breaths coming out in gasps as he struggled to explain to Phil exactly what happened.

Phil had taken it all in stride, laughing at the scene and suggesting that if they were planning on throwing things, they take it outside.

"I swear," Phil had muttered, "Y'all need to touch grass."

Which hadn't really been possible at the time because it had been pouring buckets and Ranboo didn't really want to suffer for the rest of the day.

Ranboo doesn't think he's ever heard Phil yell. He wonders if today will change that.

(He doesn't know why he thinks that would change now).

He knocks softly on the door that's appeared in front of him at some point.

"Hey Phil," he knocks, "It's Ranboo."

And god, why'd he say his name? Phil obviously knows who it is- he lived with him for half a year. He can recognize Ranboo's voice- god, he's such an idiot.

"Ranboo!" Phil says, sounding genuinely happy to hear his voice, "Come on in."

Ranboo pushes the door open gently, stepping into Phil's room. He walks over to Phil's desk, shuffling his feet oddly and not knowing quite what to do with his hands.

"Hey," he says, "What brings you here without warning?"

"Sorry," Ranboo apologizes, because gosh this whole thing is pretty awkward, isn't it. Ranboo doesn't even live here- didn't even live here for more than a year- what is he doing just showing up and expecting he'll be welcomed randomly? He's imposing on Phil and Wilbur and Fundy and that's not fair at all.

Plus he had dropped Fundy earlier, how could he have done that?

A wave of shame races through Ranboo so violently that he scrunches his eyes tight harshly until he sees red and orange in his eyelids.

"Hey, kiddo, you're okay," Phil soothes, "let's take a deep breath now, come on."

Ranboo lets Phil lead him through the exercise and pushes the bullcrap thoughts he's having to the side as best he can.

“I didn’t mean to upset you,” Phil says, as if it’s his fault Ranboo keeps messing these things up. He’s always been bad with people and socializing and knowing where lines should be drawn, but he thought that maybe he didn’t have to be as careful with his- this family.

“You’re welcome here,” Phil encourages, “Always. This is your home.”

“Is it though?” Ranboo asks, “Cause y’know I really only lived her for a little bit and y’know with how bad my memory is I don’t remember some solid chunks of it.”

Phil blinks at him.

“Come with me for a moment,” he encourages, getting up from his desk. Ranboo rolls his eyes- and god why is he being so irritable? Phil’s being so nice to him.

But now that he reflects, his emotions have always kind been that way, changing like the wind. He pushes the thought away and he follows Phil downstairs.

Phil leads him outside, to Techno’s garden. He takes a seat on the bench that’s out there and pats the seat next to him. Ranboo rolls his eyes again, but nods and joins.

“See the peppers,” Phil gestures, “those are the same ones you planted. The frost didn’t kill them and Techno worked his ass off trying to make sure they would be okay. A bunch of the stuff he just replants with the seasons. But he didn’t want to take out your peppers.”

“I don’t live here,” Ranboo grumbles.

“You don’t,” Phil agrees, “but you did for a bit. And this home will always be ready for you to call it home whenever you need it. And if you never need it again, that’s alright too.”

“I fought with Niki,” Ranboo admits, “I dunno. I’m not even sure it was a fight. She called me a liar.”

“She said that?”

“I mean, not exactly,” Ranboo says, studying the peppers, “But pretty much. She said that I was making things up- in a pitying way.”

“What was she saying you made up?”

“That my dad abused the crap out of me.”

“Oh,” Phil says. It’s so quiet it always gets carried away in the nonexistent wind.

“Sorry,” Ranboo says reflexively, 'cause this is his fault after all.

“Did you- are you seeing a therapist?”

“Yeah,” Ranboo admits, “But I dunno. I feel like things are going really well but I’m- I dunno I just feel worse. And not like the ‘I’m making progress and so it hurts’ worse. Like worse, worse.”

“What do you mean?” Phil says.

Ranboo shrugs, digging the tip of his shoe through the ground, making little lines in the thin gravel.

How does he explain to Phil that every session his therapist has him close his eyes and remember his past trauma and then she tells him he did good and then leaves it at that?

Actually to be fair, that’s how he could explain it to Phil exactly.

“Wait- how long have you had this therapist?” Phil asks with a frown.

“Few weeks, two months-ish?” Ranboo says, “And I dunno like I said-”

“Wait,” Phil says, “Woah, woah, you’re doing intense trauma therapy with a therapist you’ve known for a few weeks?”

“I mean yeah,” Ranboo says, “What’s wrong with that?”

“Well, have you discussed the pros and cons of this sort of memory recovery? Or- or- I mean did she explain why she thought this was the best form of treatment? Have you tried other ways of discussing trauma? Why are you even discussing trauma?”

Ranboo just stares at him, trying to comprehend each of his questions.

“Why are you acting like something’s wrong with this?” Ranboo asks. It’s a genuine question, though it comes out with anger Ranboo didn’t even know he had in him.

“Well you’re discussing that you’re investigating your past trauma,” Phil says, “but you haven’t explained if you’re doing any trauma processing to go along with that.”

“Oh,” Ranboo says. Is that what this is about? Trauma processing? Well no worries there, Ranboo has an answer to that. “Well that’s because we’re not.”

“You’re not- you’re not processing the severe childhood trauma that you’re remembering over a decade down the line?”

“No?” Ranboo says, feeling vaguely as if that’s not the answer Phil wants. Or maybe- maybe he’s more than ‘vaguely’ aware that’s not the answer Phil wants. He’s very much aware that is not the answer Phil wants.

But why?

Why is that not the answer Phil wants?

“Ranboo that’s...” Phil trails off.

“Okay so obviously this is something not good, but you’re gonna have to explain this to me, why is this not good?”

Phil hesitates.

“Phil?” Ranboo says, “Because to be completely honest you’re freaking me out a bit here.”

“Okay,” Phil says, “Okay, so obviously I’m not a professional. I’m just a guy who’s dealt with trauma myself and I have kids with some pretty severe trauma. Okay? I’m not a professional?”

Ranboo nods. Mandatory disclaimer out of the way, get on with it.

“It’s- okay mate, well you’re tackling a lot of very difficult subjects all at once without understanding why you’re doing it or what to do with it. In result, something that could seem like progress will quickly become overwhelming.”

Ranboo blinks.

What?

Phil sighs.

“It’s- okay mate, these bad memories, these traumatic memories? It’s similar to trauma building up in a trashcan, okay? And when a trashcan starts to overflow, you need to take it out so trashmen can properly handle it and process it. Because if you don’t take it out, it just overflows and starts spilling across rooms. And trash can rot and mold and if it gets bad enough, it can even affect your health. Which is why you need to regularly take the trash bag.

“And you might feel- hey the trash can wait a bit, I’m saving a trash bag- but really that’s an issue with the trash bag supply. Because trash shouldn’t sit for that long. Or maybe you don’t have the energy to take the trash out. But if that’s the case, someone needs to help you take the trash out or you need to slow down trash production.

“Because it’s not sanitary or safe to live in a house full of trash.”

Oh.

Oh. Ranboo’s- well Ranboo’s pretty sure his metaphorical trashcan is overflowing. And the person who’s supposed to help him take it out is just helping produce more trash.

“Hey Phil?” Ranboo asks, “Do you think you can help me find a new therapist?”

“Yeah, yeah mate, we can do that.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

“Anything,” Phil promises, “anything.”

“What about murder?”

Phil laughs, gets off the bench, and begins the walk inside.

“Maybe not murder,” he admits, “What’s your insurance?”

Ranboo blinks.

“I don’t know,” he admits. He’s used it a few times lately, but all the details elude him. “But I- I have an insurance card,” he says.

“Awesome,” Phil says, “let’s start there. Do you know how to contact your insurance for a list of therapists near you?”

Ranboo shakes his head.

“Sounds vaguely familiar,” he admits, “I think Niki helped show me how to do that for my primary physician.”

“Alright,” Phil says, “let’s go back up to my room, I’ll show you how it works and we’ll see if we can even call some people today, maybe get you on a waitlist if everyone’s full.”

Ranboo blinks.

“Now?” he asks.

“No time like the present.”

Ranboo shrugs, and shuffles in after him.

“Hey Phil?”

“Mm?”

“Do you think there’s any way we could also get me a chest x-ray?”

Phil turns, meets his eyes for a second. Ranboo doesn’t expand or clarify, and Phil doesn’t request that he does. He seems to take it all in stride, giving Ranboo a small nod with zero judgment behind it.

“Yeah we can figure that out,” he agrees easily.

Ranboo sighs a breath he doesn’t realize he’s been holding.

"Okay. Okay thanks."

Something in Ranboo that’s been coiled and tight for so long settles. Phil gives him a smile, and this time when Ranboo gives one back it isn’t forced.

Ranboos going thru it rip but also okay fundy is so cute i fucking love him so much

I'm not doing so hot rn because recovery has its up and down. That means u may be getting faster and/or slower updates, so ye, just letting yall know. Please don't send me get well soon/hope everything is okays/we're here for yous. I don't find them comforting /nm

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

Encompass Sandbox Project: The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

revisiting

Chapter Summary

Ranboo continues to spend some time recovering at Phil's. It's enough to encourage him to move forward and talk with Tommy and Tubbo, as well as his therapist. One of these conversations goes better than the other.

Chapter Notes

CW: memory issues, tics, tic attack, feelings of betrayal, guilt and shame, self-worth issues, gaslighting, yelling and arguing, bad therapist

Special thanks to Ari for sensitivity reading/beta-ing this chapter. You can find her at [teasdays](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next bit is hazy when he looks back on it, but Phil helped him take notes in his memory book so he understood all the insurance stuff.

It's a lot to remember and a lot to deal with and when Ranboo even looks down at the pages he starts to feel vaguely sick. It's all so, so overwhelming. He doesn't- he doesn't know how to manage it all. But Phil has already done so much, held Ranboo's hand through the entire process and practically carried him over the finish line.

He helped Ranboo write all the details he needed down- if the note 'Phil is a god. He went through all of this with you and helped you write it down' in his memory book is anything to go by.

The good news is that he gets an appointment with a new therapist in three weeks. It's longer than Ranboo really wants it to be but the unfortunate truth is that it's actually a really decent time frame for getting in to see a therapist.

They also get him on a wait-list for another therapist in case this one doesn't work out.

After- well after Ranboo's still not ready to go home, still hurt by everything that happened with Niki and then Tubbo and Tommy.

Phil lets him stay the night, like he had said before and Ranboo enjoys his evening playing blocks with Fundy.

Ranboo has a lot of fun playing blocks with Fundy. Maybe even a bit too much fun for a young adult. It's just that- well Fundy- Fundy reminds him of himself when he was a kid. Another irony considering Ranboo doesn't remember his childhood.

When Fundy plays, he- instead of playing randomly or making up fantasy worlds- has the genius idea of using his blocks to build off of the table, seeing how far he can get off the table with a tower perpendicular to the floor. It's almost like he's building a bridge from one surface to another, but there isn't another surface. He's building into the void of air, hoping that the sideways tower doesn't go crumbling to the floor.

And yes the kid is three.

It's a peculiar way to play, one that resonates with Ranboo.

Fundy's a quick learner too- for a toddler. He adjusts blocks and the base to get further and further every time.

"Having fun?" Wilbur asks at one point.

Ranboo nods, because he really, really is. Blocks are so fun.

Wilbur smiles at him.

"Did you get to play a lot as a kid?" he asks.

Ranboo thinks about the question for a moment.

"I don't think so," he says, "don't 'member a bunch."

"Fair enough."

"I like his block game though. I would play those types of games, I think. When I did play."

Wilbur snorts.

"Not surprised," he said, "it's a very autistic way of playing."

"It is?"

Ranboo hadn't known that. He's only had a diagnosis for a few years now and every moment he feels like there's something in his life that he's done forever that is apparently a clear autistic trait.

Part of it is nice, being able to finally connect and understand how his brain works. The other part of him is resentful, angry he wasn't diagnosed sooner. If it was so obvious, how had no one noticed sooner? If it was so obvious, why did they push so harshly to not diagnose him?

"Mhmm, repetition like this, the task based with a specific focus? Concrete play- strict rules? Experimentation with a resolute, set goal? Not uncommon at all for autistic kids."

"Huh," Ranboo acknowledges, "I didn't know that."

Wilbur gives him a smile and before he can say anything else Fundy is demanding his uncle 'Wanboo' back for block building.

Later that night, Ranboo writes about the night in his memory book. It's a night he really wants to hold on to. Part of his brain also thinks he should do some homework. With everything that's been going on he's really started to fall behind.

At least he has his disability accommodations. Otherwise he'd be screwed.

He makes a note about homework in his memory book as well as he sits on the living room couch that evening. He doesn't have the energy to figure it out all that school stuff tonight tonight.

Fundy scampers into his lap as he does so, narrowly avoiding kicking him in the crotch and successfully jabbing his tiny elbows into Ranboo's sides.

"Watcha doing?" he asks.

"Writing about today," Ranboo says.

"Oh 'kay. Why?"

Ranboo snorts at the intense curiosity in the gaze of such a small body.

"Cause I had a lot of fun and if I forget this, I want to have a record of it."

Fundy cocks his head and drives his face into Ranboos chest, staring up at him.

"Oh 'cause you gots memmey loss," Fundy says.

"Mhmm," Ranboo agrees.

He decides not to question why or how Fundy knows that. He assumes he's been told by Phil or Wilbur and- well honestly Ranboo appreciates it.

A lot of times he hates talking about his memory issues. People either get super pitying about it all, saying how they couldn't imagine how hard it is. Or people try to relate, laughing at his words and saying that they're forgetful too.

Being forgetful isn't the same as forgetting.

And it's not something to pity. Ranboo's so fucking sick of pity, sick of people treating him like his life has this tragic sentence.

And now that he's recovering all these trauma memories, well Ranboo's starting to think forgetting has been good for him.

Hard at times- yes, frustrating- for sure, but also- relieving. It's allowed him to function, to stay together, to cope with terrible things that have happened to him.

It's just- he's just Ranboo, y'know? And his memory issues are a part of that.

Besides Niki, Phil's family were the first people to treat it that way, treating his memory loss like Ranboo wanted it and needed it treated.

Usually he doesn't like telling people, or people being told, but if there's anyone he trusts to tell that information, it's Phil's family.

"Cool," Fundy says, "can I write to you in it?"

"Sure," Ranboo says, passing the book over.

His own willingness shocks himself for a second, because his memory book has always been so intensely private to him.

It's just- Ranboo sees it as an extension of his brain. And he doesn't like the idea that anyone can access his brain. Ranboo's fine sharing things from his memory books, fine with even reading parts word for word.

But there's an invasive feeling when someone physically has it in their own hands.

For some reason, Fundy having it doesn't bother him the same way

He hands it over and Fundy grabs the pen out of his hand and begins his scribbles.

The scribbles are vague enough that Ranboo can't actually tell if Fundy is trying to write something or if he's just copying the general motion of writing.

Three year olds can't write, right? That's got to be too young.

But Ranboo also knows all of nothing about kids so maybe he's completely off.

Eventually Fundy hands the book back to him, apparently satisfied with his work if his proud grin is anything to go by. He bounces up and down on Ranboo's lap as he's done.

"I love it," Ranboo approves, "it's, um- it's..."

"Is my name!" Fundy announces, "duh."

Right. Duh. Now that he's looking for it, Ranboo thinks he can maybe make out a 'U'. Does Fundy even know how to spell his own name?

"Is okay if you can't tell," Fundy says, patting him on the shoulder. Ranboo can't tell if it's genuine comfort, or Fundy being strangely condescending. God, kids are so weird.

When Fundy goes off to bed that evening, Wilbur asks him how his time with Ranboo went and Fundy excitedly explains about the memory book. Wilbur gives Ranboo a look, and after

he'd put his son to bed, came back to join Ranboo in the living room.

"You know, if you don't want him touching your things, you can just tell him," Wilbur says, "it's okay to have healthy boundaries with him- it's good for him actually. And you."

"It was okay," Ranboo confirms.

"Well if it wasn't- just know you can say something."

Huh. Yeah imagine. Ranboo would definitely just... not do that.

Ranboo sticks around a little longer the next day because Fundy's so insistent on spending time with him. Not that Ranboo minds. In fact, he might have to visit more. Fundy's fun to spend time with.

A fun guy indeed.

"Hey," Fundy asks, "How you's knows you're a boy?"

Ranboo blinks at him.

"What?"

"Well I'm a boy cause- cause I feel like boy. And Papa's a boy cause he borns a boy and that fit. And Daddy's kinda a boy cause he's not borns boy or girl and feels more boy but not all boy. So how do you know you's a boy?"

Uhhh... is it wrong to say Ranboo's never really thought about it? Or maybe that's- maybe that's what being cis is, never wondering.

But now that he is wondering...

"I guess I'm a boy because..." Ranboo starts.

Fundy nods, peering up at him, a smile stretching across his face and absolutely enthralled in his words. Ranboo's never really thought he had anything interesting to say, but Fundy makes him feel like his words have the weight of the world behind them. Are all kids like this?

"Cause, well- I don't really know. I hadn't thought of it before."

"Oh. Okay cool. Don't know boy! That's a new boy!"

What the heck is this kid, and why does Ranboo love him so much?

Of course, Ranboo does have to go home eventually. And probably talk it out with Tubbo and Tommy. He had left them a text letting them know he was okay, but he still feels a bit bad about running out on them like that.

To be fair though, they did look like they were about to corner him in that hallway.

But he sighs, and resigns to heading home. He does have to deal with this mess eventually. Rather sooner than later.

It's sort of a backward, odd walk of shame, getting back on the bus and heading home. He feels so strangely guilty and shameful of returning like this, and really- frankly- he has no clue why.

But he has to go home. So he does.

When Ranboo pushes the door to his dorm open, he's immediately met with Tommy and Tubbo both staring into his soul from their spots on the couch. Ranboo wonders if they were waiting for him. There's nothing on the TV, so evidence points to 'probably.' How long had they been waiting?

"Hey," Ranboo says.

"Hey," Tubbo echoes. Tommy echoes both of them with a tic.

"Sorry," Tommy blurts out, "fuck, sorry dude."

"For?" Ranboo asks, genuinely curious, because he's pretty sure Tommy's not apologizing for ticcing- something he still does much too often. The apologizing for ticcing- not the ticcing itself.

Okay off topic, refocus Ranboo.

"Uh..." Tommy hesitates, reflecting on his words, "...upsetting you?"

"Do you know why I'm upset?"

Ranboo appreciates the apology but he can tell that Tommy's doing that thing where he tries to take blame and fix everything because he feels like he did something wrong versus actually taking accountability for his actions in reasonable quantities, and then addressing that, and then working on that.

The why is much more important than the actual apology here. Tommy and Tubbo both need to understand that if this is going to work.

"No," Tommy mutters.

"Yeah," Tubbo throws in, "Yeah I- why did you do that? Niki called us and-"

"I'm not lying," Ranboo blurts out, because he can't have his best friends ganging up on him as well as his sister, "I'm not, I'm not, I promise."

"Woah, woah, woah," Tommy says. He makes a time out symbol with his hands and Ranboo thinks about how absurd the symbol is. He's never seen Tommy do that. "Rewind."

"Lying about what, bossman?" Tubbo asks.

“Bout my dad,” Ranboo mumbles, looking down at his feet. He’s still wearing his shoes, he should probably take them off before he tracks all the outside germs through their apartment. The city isn't exactly the cleanest.

He toes them off, then and there.

“Bossman, you know I love you but I don’t know what the fuck you say when you mumble,” Tubbo not-so-gently reminds. It still is gentle though, because it’s Tubbo. Tubbo’s not-gentleness is its own form of gentle, something familiar and soothing.

“Niki thinks I’m lying about my dad,” Ranboo says.

“I thought you didn’t remember, well, anything, about your dad,” Tommy notes.

“I don’t,” Ranboo replies, honesty flowing out of him, “Or I didn’t- or I don’t know. It’s confusing.”

“Okay,” Tommy says, “yeah, that seems like it could be confusing.” Tommy's face scrunches up and his eyes blink repeatedly with a lingering tic. It makes it harder for Ranboo to read his facial expression. Not that that says much, Ranboo has always been shit with visual social cues and body language.

Even so, Ranboo’s pretty sure Tommy and Tubbo still think he’s lying. But he does have that little hint of validation from Tommy and that’s enough for the moment.

“Also, we have no clue what you’re talking about,” Tubbo says, “Tommy said Niki called him and said that she was worried about you,” Tubbo turns to Tommy. “That was it, right?”

“Yeah,” Tommy confirms, “that was it.”

“Oh,” Ranboo says. “Oh.”

Why would she say that? Niki obviously thinks he’s lying or making things up and she’s determined to defend their parents even though- even though Ranboo’s dad hurt him, he’s so, so sure.

But is he? Did he? Because Niki has a point, his memory isn’t accurate and it’s scrambled and a mess and god what if Ranboo is making all of this up?

Maybe- well maybe it’s the new therapist. Because she- well she’s not great, right? So maybe her methods made his memory fabricate all of this. Maybe- well he's always been a bit clumsy. And with memory issues- there’s a chance he has broken his wrist a few times.

There’s no- Ranboo has no proof.

All he has is his memories- if they even really are memories- and Ranboo knows better than anyone how unreliable memory can be.

What a fucking mess.

Either way, he's stopping his sessions with his current therapist. Tommy and Tubbo are a bit surprised by the news- probably because Ranboo's been so insistent that she's really helped.

"Phil and I talked," Ranboo explains, "and I don't- well I'm not sure my therapist is being super... responsible? I don't know if that's the right word- but basically her methods seemed really odd and potentially concerning to Phil and, well that made me realize how things looked and well, I'm probably going to end things."

Ranboo doesn't even look at his friends, doesn't wait for the reaction before he keeps speaking.

"At least- we'll talk, hopefully. But I don't know- I don't think. Maybe she will change. We'll talk."

"Is it uh- POGGERS THAT'S POGGERS, little bitch boy killed a woman and, and you're a bitch, little bitch boy-"

Whatever Tommy was trying to say is easily overtaken in a wave of tics and Ranboo and Tubbo both reroute from the conversation once it becomes obvious that his tics aren't just bad, but that he's having a tic attack.

The three of them sit on the couch- not without almost getting punched by Tommy who barely managed a sorry around the verbal tics.

But like everything else in life, Tommy's tic attack comes to an end and after quite a few minutes he can finally get a sentence around the involuntary motions.

"Sorry," Tommy mutters, "killed a woman, killed a woman, feeling good."

"You don't need to be," Tubbo confirms as quickly as he can apologize. Ranboo nods his steady agreement, ready to support and do his best to show Tommy that he will always be there, no matter what Tommy's brain convinces him otherwise.

"Sorry, this- little bitch boy- this whole thing has been- POGGERS, THAT'S POGGERS- not poggers actually, it's been- POGGERS- it's rough and- hey mate, hey, how you doing? You alright mate-"

Tommy cuts himself off with a frustrated huff. He continues to verbally tic quietly.

Usually Ranboo hates to interrupt. When he does, it's usually more of an involuntary thing than anything else. It's a faux pas, an instance where Ranboo genuinely can't grasp the flow of conversation and realize when one person is ending and the other is beginning and-

He always waits for Tommy to get through sentences- tics and all- because he's seen enough people guess Tommy's words for him when it takes him longer and he's seen firsthand how frustrating it can be for him.

But Ranboo also sees how frustrated Tommy is now, how determined Tommy is to not make this about him, but worry about Ranboo, that Ranboo is pretty sure it's okay for him to jump in.

He thinks.

Hopefully.

God, people are hard. Socializing is hard. Why can't they all be moles who live in holes in the dirt?

"It's been rough," Ranboo confirms, "'cause one minute I'm fine, the next I'm talking about being abused, the next I'm in the hospital, and the next I'm running away."

Tommy meets his eyes- and it's one of those kinds of eye contact where Ranboo can't break away even if he wanted to- and nods.

Ranboo sighs deeply, feels his breath ripple through him like waves in an ocean.

"I'm okay," he promises, because he doesn't know what else to say. "But I think- well that's why I'm not going to this therapist anymore- because I think some of this is related to our sessions."

Cue Tommy and Tubbo staring at him even more intensely than before.

Ranboo does his best to explain.

He doesn't want to tell them everything because they were his therapy sessions and it was his therapist and he feels like he deserves to at least hold some privacy.

Luckily, even with the limited info, Tommy and Tubbo catch on quickly to the fact that something is wrong with this therapist, something is really wrong, and support his choice wholeheartedly.

Tommy even offers to wait in the lobby during the whole session for him.

Ranboo doesn't really think he needs the support. After all, he doesn't think his therapist has bad intentions. Plus, Phil isn't a professional. There is still a chance Ranboo brings up his concerns and his therapist and him talk about it and work it all out. There could be a legit reason for tackling his trauma the way they are.

Ranboo's not giving up hope, he's just aware that what his therapist has been doing sounds very not good and now that he's aware of it from an outside perspective it makes him feel very uncomfortable and unsafe.

Luckily, he now has that new therapy appointment scheduled, so he'll be able to jump right back in and avoid having a lengthy gap between going back to therapy.

But first things first, stopping his current sessions.

He lets Tommy hang in the lobby anyways, it isn't like there's any harm to it. Plus, Ranboo can tell Tommy's worried about him and maybe this will help.

So he has his final session with his therapist.

And oh boy it's certainly going to be his last session once the conversation gets started.

"I'm pretty disappointed in you Ranboo."

And ow- if that doesn't hurt ten times more to hear from a therapist.

"I just- Phil had a point-" Ranboo tries to explain, deciding to ignore that first major red flag of hers.

"Phil isn't a professional."

"I know that-" Ranboo protests, wondering when his therapist got into the habit of interrupting him. "I'm not saying he's right. All I'm saying is that the things he said made me think and it made me concerned and I wanted to discuss it all with you. Are we going to process my trauma? If not, why? And- why are we doing trauma exploration the way we are?"

All of his questions are fair, they make sense. And honestly- even if his question didn't make sense, his therapist should gently address that, discuss that with him. She's supposed to be the leader here. Ranboo should be able to rely on her.

"If you don't trust my methods-"

Once again, she fails to earn his trust.

"That's not what I'm saying," Ranboo argues, even though at this point, that's fairly accurate. But that's not the point of this conversation. "I just- I feel like I deserve to be aware of my own plan of treatment."

"I don't think this is going to work out if you can't trust me."

Ranboo's anger fades and instead, a shaky feeling travels across his body.

"What-" he protests. Because okay, maybe he had been preparing to end this relationship, but his therapist is making this all sound so personal. It really, really isn't. It's just that-

Well maybe it is personal? What makes it impersonal versus personal? Why are people so difficult?

But Ranboo's not trying to hurt her, he just needs and deserves good care. And he doesn't think he's getting that. Which is why he's trying to have an open conversation.

Apparently, that isn't a conversation his therapist wants to have.

"I thought you were ready to work on your trauma," his therapist says, "I'm-" she shakes her head, "I thought you were ready."

Ranboo holds on to his hope, because maybe this is where she takes accountability and they begin to fix things.

“You’re never going to get better if you don’t face your past. You chose to forget these things for a reason-”

That’s- that crosses a line. Ranboo's memory issues aren't a choice. A bitter taste sits in his mouth and his fingers scrunch at his sides.

“Hey, wait, my memory-”

“No, Ranboo-” she snaps, genuinely snaps, voice loud and angry and something in Ranboo breaks. He begins to cry and doesn’t know why or when he started.

Maybe it’s because he’s supposed to be safe here. Therapy is always supposed to be his safe place and with his therapist saying these things to him he feels violated in a way he’s never felt before.

It feels like she’s holding his memory book, he realizes. It's like she’s holding his memory book and is flipping through every page and then lighting it on fire.

And Ranboo cries.

Which is when Tommy bursts into the room.

“What is going on in here?” he barks, properly mad.

Is it bad to say Ranboo feels even worse now?

Chapter End Notes

I have not gotten to the past chapters comments at all, but I will eventually.

I've had a Murphy's law sort of 1-2 weeks and sorry not sorry but my health and personal life comes before responding to fanfic comments however much I do love and appreciate them. Thanks for understanding.

Also bro chronic illness is a bitch like,,,,, can I have some spoons please? pleaseeee

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[Encompass Sandbox Project](#): The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

[encompass: the sandbox](#): encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

[encompass: behind the scenes](#): an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the

scenes content.

REMINDER: the launch of encompass: behind the scenes is here! This launch starts with [Encompass Q&A](#) as well as the [encompass: the sandbox](#). I'd love if you checked them out.

breaking cycles, repeating circles

Chapter Summary

Ranboo faces the fallout of the last therapy session and begins to move forward on his journey to actually getting his trauma processed and proved.

Chapter Notes

CW: yelling, verbal fighting, intentionally triggering someone, calling someone a bad person, discussion of suicide and self harm, dissociation, memory issues and problem, feelings of panic and fear.

Special thanks to Ari for sensitivity reading/beta-ing this chapter. You can find her at [teasdays](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo doesn't remember the rest of the therapy session, just vague details like Tommy yelling and him feeling this sick twisted form of heartbreak and betrayal. Only part of it is directed at his therapist.

In fact, it's really only a small part that's directed at his therapist. A large part- well a large part is directed at Tommy.

"Hey 'boo," Tommy mutters, pulling him down onto the couch with him, "how you doing?"

Ranboo's hands are still shaking and god there's still that whitish rash, he really needs to get that looked at.

He rips his hands away from Tommy and stands to his full height. Properly standing too, not that usual slouch he always has to make himself seem a little less imposing.

"Why would you do that?" he snaps.

Tommy falters, worried eyes fading to reveal a deep frown.

"What?" he says.

"I- how- why would you do that?" Ranboo demanded, "You just- just barged into my therapy session. What would ever make you think that was okay?"

Tommy's eyes go wide.

"Well, you were crying," Tommy defends.

"So?" Ranboo says, "Newsflash Tommy, people sometimes cry in therapy."

"But-" Tommy protests.

"No," Ranboo immediately shuts down. "No, no Tommy. There is no world in which what you did was ever okay."

"Hey!" Tommy protests, standing up and doing his best attempt to meet Ranboo's height, "You literally- just, just killed a woman- said she was making you feel unsafe and you were crying-"

"You're defending yourself," Ranboo realizes, chuckling at the absolute absurdity of it all. "I'm telling you what you did wasn't okay and you're not listening-"

"Oh fuck you," Tommy says.

"No, Tommy," Ranboo bites back, "No. God can't you just shut up for a minute and realize that you were a really shitty person? Mind your own goddamn business. You weren't fucking needed, much less wanted."

It's a fair rebuttal, equal exchange for what Tommy throws at him. They're both in the wrong here, arguing like that. But their triggers are different.

And Ranboo's words... Ranboo's words...

Well Tommy shuts up alright. And instead of finding burning flames behind Tommy's eyes, Ranboo finds lakes. Instead of clenched hands, Ranboos finds a tremble running course through his entire body.

"And what is going on here?" Tubbo barks- from on top of the coffee table for some reason. The oddness of where he stands has Ranboo paying more attention to him than Tommy.

During those few seconds- in those few seconds, Tommy pushes past Ranboo with a sharp shove.

"I hate you," Tommy hisses as he passes him, "Ranboo, I fucking hate you."

After that, Tommy's gone and Ranboo hears the loud slamming of a door behind him.

It's the last thing he remembers.

Later, he has to ask Tubbo what happened.

Which is... well, what happened is pretty difficult to explain.

After all, how does Tubbo come up with the words that he held Ranboo while he screamed and sobbed and tried to rip open the fresh scars on his arms. How does Tubbo explain that he was so scared that he debated calling an ambulance and had called Phil. How does Tubbo tell him that Tommy even came back out of his room to help hold him because they had been so worried?

How do you explain that to someone?

In the case of Ranboo, it's over a mug of peppermint tea and whispers that barely reach his ears.

Tubbo sits next to him, Tommy's already disappeared back to his room once more.

The tea goes cold in front of him. Ranboo doesn't think he can manage to keep anything else down.

"Hey, what's up with your hands?" Tubbo asks.

Distantly Ranboo sees them, notices the white splotches on them that haven't gone away and have even maybe seemed to grow.

"Oh. Got a rash from the wet wipes I bought."

"That doesn't look like any rash I've seen."

Ranboo hums.

"Maybe get that looked at," Tubbo suggests.

"Yeah," Ranboo says, "Maybe."

They sit in silence for a while. Usually they can do that without complaint, just a form of comfort, two friends relaxing in silence.

But something feels stifling about this one and Ranboo knows the worst isn't over.

"Do you think Tommy will forgive me?" Ranboo asks.

Tubbo sighs.

"Boss man, I think he's already forgiven you. The question is more of if he's going to forgive himself."

Well that really doesn't make Ranboo feel any better.

The worst part is that Ranboo knows he just needs to talk to Tommy. The worst part is there's nothing Ranboo wants to do less than talk to Tommy.

But fuck it, their friendship is worth it.

So just the day after they had their shouting match, Ranboo knocks on Tommy's door.

He releases the breath he has been holding.

"What if we just didn't and forget that it even happened and move forward?" Tommy suggests through the door.

"Connect, break, repair," Ranboo reminds.

Ranboo leans against Tommy's door. He can't see Tommy, nor can he hear him, but Ranboo knows he's hooked Tommy's attention with those few words.

How could he not? Connection, break, repair is the foundation of relationships. Or at least, it's an explanation that's helped both Tommy and Ranboo.

The idea is that people form connections. They bond, interact, spend time together. Those little moments are ways of connecting, interacting.

But all relationships have issues, it's a reality, unavoidable. People aren't perfect. These, these are the breaks. Breaks in relationships happen.

Sometimes they're an indicator that something more is wrong, an indicator of a toxic relationship, especially if they happen more often than connections.

But other times they're just part of life.

The important part is that when breaks in a relationship occur, you repair.

Repairing means talking it out, addressing the break and mending the relationship. Because without repairing what's been broken, you can't properly connect again.

When your bag tears and things spill out you can't keep putting things in it. The bag has to be mended, restitched and sewn if it's ever to be used again.

Tommy and Ranboo need to figure this out if they're going to have a healthy relationship.

"Come in," Tommy grumbles, and Ranboo gently opens the door.

Tommy's on his bed, lying on his stomach with his face burrowed into a pillow as he clutches it with tight hands.

Ranboo walks carefully over to bed, taking a seat on its edge.

Tommy moves at the motion, scrambling up to a seated position with his back to the bed rest. He looks at Ranboo with a steady gaze and his head knocks back in a sharp tic.

Of course, with his position his skull slams against the backboard of his bed and a moment later Tommy is hissing in pain and clutching the back of his head.

Ranboo makes a noise something like a dying rat.

"Mehnm-" he says, "you okay?"

"Yeah," Tommy hisses, hand still rubbing the tender spot. He moves away from the backboard. Probably a smart decision considering the frequency of the head knock back tic Tommy has.

So there they sit, the two of them on Tommy's bed, trying to figure out how to discuss what happened last night.

All of a sudden, Ranboo thinks back to what Wilbur had said to him a few days ago. Honestly, he's so shocked that he even remembers the conversation that he almost forgets to actually process and reflect on what he remembers.

Wilbur had said that maybe- maybe the people in Ranboo's life weren't giving him the support he needed. But they didn't know how else to. And they were trying.

They care about him, and they are trying.

Tommy was trying.

"Sorry," Ranboo admits- "I- look, I still defend that it wasn't okay for you to do what you did. But, I understand that you were worried and concerned about me. Which is, well, which is really sweet. And I said things I shouldn't have. That's not what I meant, and I think I- I wanted you to stop so I said things that I knew would hurt. I didn't mean them, I could never mean them. I said them because I knew I would get what I want, and that wasn't okay of me."

Tommy snuffles, pushing roughly at his eyes as he tries to hide the growing tears from Ranboo.

"Fuck," he groans, "I told myself I wasn't gonna cry."

"You can cry," Ranboo says.

"Fuck," Tommy says, hands shoving further into his face as if it would somehow make him not have to deal with this. "Fuck."

Tommy takes a deep shuddering breath.

"I just- I was trying to help-" Tommy pleads, "I'm sorry- sorry mate, sorry 'bout that- I'm sorry for- well I want to be sorry for what I did. I just- I was worried about you- bitch, you're a bitch- and I've been so worried about you and- and what you said really hurt," Tommy admits, voice small, "cause like, cause like that's the- that's the bitch. That's the-"

Tommy finally pulls his hands away from his eyes to make some sort of aborted gesture before bringing his hands to chest, clutched as if holding an invisible knife or sword that he stabs into his own chest.

"I know," Ranboo says because he does, he does know. He gets it he knows and he hates himself for doing this to Tommy. "I know. I'm sorry."

"It's okay," Tommy says, "I forgive you. Was the heat of a moment, we both were saying things to hurt each other."

Ranboo nods.

"I'm just really, really worried about you," Tommy repeats.

Ranboo hesitates, fingers pulling at each other as a near silent hum sits in his throat. He starts to gently rock.

"Why?" he asks.

Tommy turns to stare at him.

"What do you mean? Why- well of course I'm worried."

"About what?"

"Ranboo I don't know if this rings any bells but you did try to kill yourself a week ago," Tommy snarks. Because Tommy's always defended his insecurities and fears with humor. Unhealthy coping mechanisms take a long time to change. Healing isn't immediate. Recovery isn't linear.

"I told you I was okay?" Ranboo frowns, not quite understanding where this concern comes from.

Tommy barks out a laugh, something more deranged than light.

"You're okay," Tommy laughs again, in that same way. "Ranboo, you- you can't just say that after you just tried to kill yourself."

"But I didn't," Ranboo stresses. Tommy opens his mouth to argue but Ranboo pushes on. "I get that you're worried. But I didn't try to kill myself. I had no intent of killing myself. I am not suicidal. I don't want to die. That- that suicide attempt was a dissociated part of me that I'm trying, I'm still trying to manage better. And that's why I'm in therapy! Because I'm not okay! But I will be. Things are hard right now, sure, but I'm not suicidal. But you're right that a suicide attempt is scary because- I mean I could have died. But I don't want to die. Which is why therapy is so important for me right now, to hopefully understand myself better and get a handle on my dissociation so an unintentional suicide attempt doesn't happen again," Ranboo insists, "and that's why I'm leaving my current therapist, because she was just making things worse, not better, and starting with a new one. And I- yes I was crying and yes it wasn't going well but I need you to trust me that I can handle things myself and-slash-or to ask for help when I need it."

Ranboo takes a breath, meeting Tommy's eyes.

Ranboo's always been odd with eye contact. For the most part it just doesn't come super natural to him, but when he does meet someone's eyes he can't help but hold the gaze intensely, a touch too long.

He does that with Tommy now, staring him down, staring into his soul.

"I don't need a white knight in shining armor," Ranboo insists, "I don't need you to save the day. I just need you to be my friend that waits for me to come home, whether that be to celebrate my victory or stitch up my wounds. Okay?"

"Okay," Tommy agrees, after a moment. "I can do that."

Together, they repair, building stronger than before- a friendship built on reliability and an everlasting love with the knowledge that together they are trying, and together they will do better.

And Ranboo- Ranboo begins to feel okay again.

In fact, he begins to feel okay for the first time in what has been quite a while.

"Hey," Tommy comments, "what's that on your hands?"

"What?" Ranboo responds on reflex, before taking in his words. He looks back at his slightly splotchy hands. "Oh yeah I don't know. I think it's a rash."

"A white rash? I didn't know skin could even get any whiter than what you've already got."

Ranboo snorts at the comment.

"Might be an allergy thing," he mentions, "it started appearing when I started using a different brand of wet wipes."

Tommy nods.

"You still love me, right?" Tommy asks suddenly, voice small, sacred.

"Of course," Ranboo promises, "always."

Tommy smiles at that, and then gets up from his bed.

"We should tell Tubbo we made up," he says, "he was worried."

Ranboo nods to that, and follows him out of his room. They look for Tubbo, forgetting that he's not at the apartment for the moment because he's at work. Which, hey, forgetting is supposed to be Ranboo's thing, not Tommy's.

But whatever, they send him a text and he can see it for himself later.

But for now...

"Oh shit, I have class," Ranboo realizes. A second later, his alarm for that very thing goes off. It's the final one, and he tries to remember when- if- the first one went off.

Oh well, if he leaves now he'll still be fine. And he really needs to go to class, he's missed too much work due to being in the hospital and in a pretty shitty mental state.

Tommy waves him goodbye, and Ranboo's off.

Ranboo much prefers university over high school. High school hadn't been fun.

The social pressure of being an autistic foster kid with memory issues and a body that was over two meters with an awkward ganglyness to it meant that he grew up feeling like he didn't belong anywhere.

But then even in classes- when they were actually trying to learn- Ranboo struggled. Information hadn't ever been presented to him in a way that he could properly grasp it and the limited accommodations he had were barely keeping him afloat.

In university things are completely different. He has audio notes synced to a pen that he writes with so that he can playback specific parts of lectures. He can take tests privately, can bring stim toys to class, has double time, and so much more. It's, it's relieving and Ranboo finds himself enjoying school.

He's still not really sure what he wants to do, and it's a lot of money to sink into something he's not sure what he wants to do with.

But it's... he had really liked the school and they had a good disabled students program.

It's expensive though, something Ranboo will always feel a little guilty about. Niki and him have enough to get by and even have a bit more, but they don't have any large excess. Not enough to cover university.

And Ranboo can't get a job. School and work is too much for him. So much of his energy already goes to his mental health and various disability issues that school itself is a challenge.

Work isn't possible for him right now.

But Phil's helping with college.

Part of Ranboo feels guilty about it, but it had helped that Phil had offered. And not only offered, he'd told Ranboo that there was money already set aside for him. Ranboo knows that Phil had planned to adopt him before everything with Niki had been explained to him. But Ranboo had never taken into account how deep that intention went.

Ranboo knows that he could have said no. And part of him wanted to, but he really did need the money. And well...Phil had already set it aside. Phil already budgeted without it.

So Ranboo had taken it.

Another thing he was in debt to Phil for.

It still makes his skin itch on occasion. It also gives him that odd feeling of everything in him shrinking to something smaller.

It's a feeling that's been happening more recently. Ranboo wonders if it has anything to do with this whole trauma stuff.

Thankfully enough, those horrid weeks of waiting to see a new therapist pass with relative ease and he finally gets in.

He also gets an appointment for a chest x-ray. But of course, it's the same day, so he heads over to the nearby hospital before therapy.

Phil meets him there. He'd asked if he could come, mentioning that insurance stuff was hard when you were still learning it and, hey, it'd be nice to have a buddy, right?

Ranboo gave an aborted nod, a poor attempt to explain his intense gratitude.

He also dissociates through most of it, so it really does become helpful that Phil is there.

Ranboo really doesn't like the chest x-ray. The machine is big and scary and makes this awful sound like a dog whistle. It has Ranboo walking on his heels and picking at his skin as he does his best not to cover his ears.

He also feels vaguely like crying, but he doesn't want to do that in front of the doctors. After all, he's not even hurt, they're just seeing if he's been hurt in the past.

And really why is he doing this? Why is he putting himself through this?

It's over eventually though so... small victories.

But of course he has the therapy session with his new therapist pretty much the moment his x-ray appointment is over. He's practically nonverbal at the point, the stress of the x-ray bleeding into the stress of the therapy's session.

He stumbles up to the front desk and is barely able to recite his name.

The lady there raises her eyebrow, but looks down at her computer, typing and tapping all the while.

A moment later she pauses.

"Oh. We need more insurance information," she tells him.

"Oh," Ranboo says, "oh you do?"

She nods.

"Okay!" he says just a touch panicked even though he's come prepared. "Okay, well I have my insurance card and-"

"We called you about this. This is why we call people about this."

"Oh," Ranboo stutters. They called him? Ranboo hadn't seen any calls? Maybe he had forgotten and didn't write it down.

"I'm sorry," he stumbles through, "I must have- have missed it or forgotten to call back and-"

She huffs and something in Ranboo shrinks horribly.

He feels a tightness in his chest that is all to family and his hands that were previously tapping a pattern on his leg can't even do that, instead shaking finely.

"It's fine," she huffs, "I just need your insurance holder's Social Security Number. And to see that insurance card."

"Oh!" Ranboo says, doing his best to process what's just been said to him. He uh- well he's a bit confused in that first part that she said but he has the second.

Triumphantly, he holds out his insurance card.

She blinks at him, and takes it.

Already Ranboo gets the sinking feeling he's done something wrong.

She types things into the computer.

"Okay and your insurance holder's Social Security Number."

Ranboo blinks.

"Um, wait?" he asks. "Sorry I'm really new to all of this insurance stuff the last place I was at didn't ask for that. Can you explain what that is?"

"I need the Social Security Number," she says slowly- in the way Ranboo's pretty sure that she thinks he's dumb.

"Uh, okay, my social-"

"No, the holder's."

"Uh... who?"

"Who's insurance are you on?"

Ranboo repeats the name, still lost.

The lady grumbles.

"No," she repeats, "not the company- look who is your insurance under? It's not under you, right?"

"It's my insurance?" Ranboo asks.

"But who else is on that insurance with you? Who's insurance is it in the name of?"

"Oh," Ranboo says, finally making the connection to what she's asking, "oh my sister Niki."

She sighs. It's exasperated, and loud and makes Ranboo feel so incredibly small and dumb.

"Alright," she grumbles, "and your sister's Social Security Number?"

Ranboo blanches.

"Oh," he says, "I don't know."

She stares at him, and Ranboo withers at his gaze. He wants to flap his hands to get rid of the bad feeling, but he also really doesn't want to give this woman another reason not to like him.

"Well I need that," she snaps.

It's then that Ranboo realizes what she's asking. And not just like the basic format, but the actual request. The details of it all.

"Wait," he frowns, "why do you need Niki's Social Security Number?"

She sighs once more. Part of Ranboo wants to ask her to stop, but most of him is too scared too.

"For the insurance information," she repeats.

Ranboo frowns, because to be totally honest that sounds a little sketchy. Ranboo's never been asked to give a SSN for insurance before.

At least he's pretty sure he hasn't.

But what else can he say, no?

He can't tell them no, but that also seems... weird.

He quickly comes up with a solution.

"I'm getting it right now," he promises the lady and then immediately texts Phil. He would text Niki, but they aren't exactly in talking terms right now.

He's messaging Phil where he's at and what they're asking and seconds later Phil's calling him.

Ranboo gulps and answers the phone.

Phil asks him a few questions, tone so radically different from the woman at the front desk. The woman had been harsh, all grating syllables and raised eyebrows that had Ranboo shrinking in on himself and feeling so incredibly incompetent.

Phil's voice on the other hand is soft, filled with plenty of pauses for Ranboo to speak. Ranboo can practically imagine Phil nodding as he listens and gently coaching Ranboo on what to do.

Seconds later he's asking to speak to the woman at the desk.

Ranboo stumbles.

"Uh okay," he says. He then turns back to the lady at the front desk who's staring at him, tapping her nails in a way that makes Ranboo's skin itch.

"Uh," Ranboo says. His mind flashes back to all the times teachers in high school told him not to use filler words when he speaks. Unfortunately, that just makes his stuttering worse. "Uh, um- my-"

And great, shit how does Ranboo describe his relationship to Phil? Friend? Not quite-father? Old foster parent? The first adult that isn't related to him and wasn't forced to take care of him that he felt valued by and cared for?

"-my friend," Ranboo stumbles, "wants to talk to you."

She raises an eyebrow, but takes the phone.

They talk a bit longer while Ranboo drums his hands against his thigh and tries to pretend that he's not on the verge of a panic attack.

Eventually the woman says his name, and then hands the phone back.

Ranboo takes it- almost dropping it due to how much his hands are shaking- and pulls it back up to his ear.

"Everything should be good now," Phil says when Ranboo whispers a 'hello.'

"If there's any issues, you call me straight back," Phil explains.

"Alright. Thanks Phil," Ranboo responds, hoping he doesn't sound like he's about to cry. He's pretty sure he sounds like he's about to cry.

"Are you alright?" Phil asks, "I know these things can be stressful."

He doesn't add the 'for you' at the end, but Ranboo knows what he means.

"I'm fine," he confirms. It's mostly on reflex, most of him taking stock of his emotional health at the exact moment.

Phil gives another confirmation, and soon enough they hang up.

He turns back to the person at the desk.

"You're good to go. Have a seat and the doctor should be here shortly."

Ranboo nods, and makes his way awkwardly to the chairs.

He sits in one, and immediately hates it. It's some sort of fake leather, slightly cracked around the edge and both a touch too smooth and a touch too rough. There's a surprising amount of friction for something that looks so slick and Ranboo hates everything about it.

He tries to pull his legs up slightly so they don't have to touch the chair. It's partially successful.

Gross. Who actually buys chairs like this?

The chair sucks, but they're all like that and slowly but surely they get to him. He quickly becomes overwhelmed, which is no surprise considering the awful interaction with the front desk, the humiliation of having to call Phil, and now the horrible texture and overall sensory experience of the waiting room chair.

Ranboo is done. He wants a nap. He wants to go home

Ever so embarrassingly, he begins to cry.

Not a lot, it's mostly just liquid welling in his eyes, one leaking over slightly.

It's not true crying, not really.

A door off to the side is pushed open.

"Ranboo?" a voice calls.

Ranboo looks up, spotting the young but still very much adult man in the door. He says nothing and does his best to stop his tears.

"Are you Ranboo?" he asks.

Ranboo nods.

He grins widely.

"Hi, I'm Foolish," he greets, "I believe you have an appointment with me?"

Ranboo nods loosely, still unmoving and does his best to hide his tears.

"Alright, well if you're ready, we can go on down to my office. Sound good?"

Ranboo nods, and with a sharp jerk, gets to his feet. He feels like a doll tied to wires, following Foolish but not quite following Foolish.

Foolish pushes a cracked door the rest of his way with a foot, gesturing Ranboo inside. As Ranboo enters, he notices the white noise machine just outside of the door.

Foolish must catch him looking, because he speaks up.

"Oh, right, that's a white noise machine," he explains, "because anything we say in here is private, but all the offices are so close together. We have those just in case."

Ranboo nods. Something about it seems incredibly familiar, but he can't quite put his finger on it.

"Sit anywhere you'd like," Foolish says, "or stand if you want, whatever works."

Ranboo takes note of the room for the first time.

There's a couch and two armchairs next to one another. The couch and the armchairs face the other and off to one side is a desk with a swivel chair.

The wall across from the desk has a large window, a healthy-looking potted palm, and a bookshelf.

Most of the bookshelf has games, some figurines and other toys thrown in.

At the bottom, in the far corner, a few books are shoved into the side, dust gathering on the tops.

Ranboo then remembers the question.

Therapists always say that, offer to let him sit anywhere. But therapists most always have their own spot. Ranboo knows he's not supposed to take that one. But Ranboo doesn't know which spot is Foolish's.

"Uh, where do you want to sit?" Ranboo prompts, hoping that will at least give him a better frame of options.

"Well I normally sit on that chair there," he says as he points at one of the armchairs, "but I've been known to sit in lots of places, especially if a client prefers that chair. I even have one client in which we challenge ourselves to sit in a different spot every session.

"Every session?" Ranboo echoes.

"Mhmm," Foolish agrees, "it's fun, we have a good time with it."

Ranboo considers.

"I'll take the couch," he decides, and then sits slightly off to one side of it.

Foolish smiles at him, and takes his own seat, next to the chair he told Ranboo he normally sits in.

Ranboo doesn't say anything at the choice, but he is surprised.

Foolish is... odd.

But to be fair, Ranboo will be more shocked on the day that he gets a normal therapist.

"Hi," Foolish begins, "so you're Ranboo, yeah?"

Ranboo nods, and his cheek itches slightly.

They talk from there.

Foolish learns about Ranboo, and in turn Ranboo learns about Foolish.

He learns Foolish's pronouns- he/they- and their favorite color- gold... or indigo blue.

In turn, Ranboo shares about himself. He talks a little about his family history, his closest friends, and his memory loss.

He mentions his past therapist and his concerns and about these recent memories he's beginning to uncover.

Foolish takes it all in stride, nodding and commenting in the right places and just listening when Ranboo needs that.

"Have you ever heard of False Memory Syndrome?" Foolish asks.

Ranboo's heart sinks. No he has not heard of that, but god if that name doesn't give him a few guesses.

Does Foolish think he's lying like Niki thinks he's lying? Maybe his old therapist wasn't great, but at least she believed him.

Foolish must catch some look on his face because he makes another comment.

"Okay, hey, Ranboo let me explain. Is that okay? It's- I think you might be coming to a different conclusion with those words than what I'm actually trying to communicate to you."

Ranboo still feels a bit gross, but Foolish also sounds so genuine that he can't help but nod. Either way, he doesn't meet Foolish's eyes. Eye contact is way too much right now.

He scratches at his cheek lightly, realizing after a moment that there's a light hive and that's why it keeps itching.

"Alright," Foolish says, "so... False Memory Syndrome."

Ranboo nods, and listens.

Foolish presents the facts slowly, making sure Ranboo's following.

He explains the phenomenon of people remembering traumatic memories only to realize they didn't exist. He talks about how therapists encouraged this trauma exploration and inadvertently helped patients form false memories.

He discusses how it became so hard to actually focus on trauma healing because there were waves of people insisting that they had recovered memories. He discusses how it became impossible to tell when to accept and deny patients and how tricky it was to determine the truth.

"And you think I have that," Ranboo observes.

"No," Foolish says, "actually I don't."

Ranboo shakes his leg, jittering up and down as he simultaneously drums his fingers on his knees. What does Foolish mean by that?

"It's still difficult to tell false memories from trauma that did actually occur. And it's hard approaching false memories as its own separate mental health issue- because even if the trauma memories are false, they still feel real. But one way that's been most successful in defining that a traumatic event has actually occurred is if there's evidence of that traumatic event."

Ranboos' brain short circuits trying to comment sans words, but his brain can't seem to process the information he's been given and what it means.

"Uh..." he comments.

Foolish gives him a gentle smile. Ranboo does his best to return it before remembering he has no reason to mask, and drops the smile, going back to his near frown.

"What I'm saying," Foolish explains, "is that the easiest way to prove traumatic memories are a result of a traumatic event is if there's proof that event happened."

Ranboo stops bunching his leg, instead shuffling gently across the couch, wiggling in place.

"You can get up and walk around if you want," Foolish suggests.

"No thanks," Ranboo murmurs, shaking back and forth.

"Alright," Foolish says easily, "any thoughts on what I've mentioned so far?"

Ranboo shrugs.

"That's okay too," Foolish validates. "Do you want a minute?"

Ranboo nods, studying his fingers. He picks and pulls at them, examining them as he thinks.

And as he thinks and studies his hands, his memories start to slip through his fingers. He can tell that they are, brain turning into mushy spaghetti. Ranboo can almost visualize bits and pieces dropping out and being lost.

He hates it so much, it's so frustrating.

He knows he's losing parts of his memory but there's nothing he can do about it. The confusion starts to set in.

"Um," he says, "uh-"

He means to say the name of the person in front of him.

"I-" Ranboo says, "can you- can you go over what we were talking about again?"

"Of course," the person says, "we were discussing false memories, trauma events, and how to prove if trauma events happened."

"Do you think I have false memories?" Ranboo asks.

"It's always possible," the person agrees, "but the trauma you've briefly gone over with me definitely seems likely to have occurred."

"Oh," Ranboo says, "oh." That's a lot to think about.

"What's your name?" Ranboo says.

"Foolish," the person- Foolish says. "I use he/they pronouns."

"You can do that?"

That's super interesting, Ranboo didn't know you could use he and they pronouns. That sounds- well it sounds nice, less restricting. Ranboo's happy Foolish can be comfortable with numerous sets of pronouns.

"Yeah," Foolish confirms, "you can."

"Oh. Cool."

"Ranboo," Foolish says, "are you dissociating?"

"Um, I don't think so," Ranboo admits, "I think I just, I think I just- sorry what was your question?"

"Are you dissociating?"

"No," Ranboo confirms, "no, just forgetting. Hey um, sorry what's your name again?"

"I'm Foolish, I use he/they pronouns. Do you want me to explain what's going on?"

Ranboo hesitates, and then nods.

"Yes please," he murmurs.

"Of course," the person says, "I'm Foolish. I use he/they pronouns. I'm your therapist, and we're having our first session right now. We were discussing false memories and trauma. I believe that your trauma seems to have evidence of occurring."

"Oh," Ranboo says, "sorry, what's your name?"

"I'm Foolish, my pronouns are he/they."

"Okay," Ranboo says.

"Do you want to try some grounding exercises?" Foolish asks, "Would you like help some other way?"

"Uh..." Ranboo says, "sure, grounding sounds good. I think."

"Alright," the person says.

"Um sorry," Ranboo says, "can you- what's- sorry I forgot your name. I know I keep forgetting it, I'm sorry."

"That's alright," the person says, "I'm Foolish. My pronouns are he/they. I'm going to try to help doing a grounding exercise with you."

"Okay," Ranboo says, "alright."

"Okay," Foolish says, "can you tell me your name?"

"Ranboo," he says.

"Pronouns?"

"He- uh he/him."

"My name is Foolish by the way. My pronouns are he/they. Just in case you forgot."

"Thanks," Ranboo whispers, because yeah he had forgotten.

"Can you list the people closest to you?"

"Tommy, Tubbo, Niki," Ranboo lists, breath only hitching slightly over the last name.

"Can you list three of your interests?"

"Uh..." Ranboo says, "My friends. Lego. Horror. Animals."

That was four things- the person- uh his therapist- they said three things, right? Ranboo's doing this whole thing wrong. Before he gets too far down that spiraling path, the person in front of him speaks again.

"Okay my name is Foolish. I use he/they pronouns. We're doing a grounding exercise. What's your name?"

"Ranboo," Ranboo says.

They run through the whole list again, slightly faster. This time Foolish adds on a category about Ranboo's own traits, where he lives, and where he is.

They keep running through a few more times slowly recalling more and more of it each time and his brain not doing whatever weird shit it was doing.

Eventually, something in him settles and stops shorting out every few seconds. He comes back to himself, and is able to finally see the room.

"Hey," Foolish says, and this time Ranboo actually remembers his name, "Back with me?"

Ranboo nods. He swears he hears a distant buzzing, but he's not sure why or from where he would be hearing that.

"That's good to hear," Foolish says, "How are you feeling?"

"Tired," Ranboo admits. His ears are still ringing. He's very much here and not dissociating but he's so exhausted from the mental loops his brain has put him in that everything still seems somewhat out of focus.

"That's understandable," Foolish says, "We talked about some rough things today."

Ranboo frowns, "We barely talked about trauma at all."

Foolish shrugs.

"We may not have gone in depth about your trauma, but trauma as a topic in general is already really heavy and something that past therapist's haven't guided you through in healthy ways in the past. It's unsurprising that today was a lot."

Ranboo appreciates Foolish. It's nice to see his work respected, because this has been really hard even if they didn't talk about much.

"Our time's about up," Foolish admits, "But I want to make sure you're okay before sending you off."

"I'm okay," Ranboo repeats back. It's partially without thought, but it's also true so he doesn't deny it. He blinks, "Wait, our time's up already?"

"Yeah," Foolish says, and sure enough their hour and twenty minutes has already passed. Huh. It really didn't seem that long. Ranboo wonders how much of it was his brain messing up.

"Alright," he allows. Ranboo then reflects on the session for a minute, making sure he has no last thoughts. But actually, actually he does. "One final question for you," he comments.

"Yes?" Foolish says. He's leaned back and relaxed, open. It makes Ranboo feel safe and comfortable so he asks his question.

"You- um, you said your pronouns are he/they- you can do that?"

"Yup!" Foolish agrees, "People can definitely use multiple pronoun s-"

"No, I know that," Ranboo interrupts. When he realizes what he did, he blushes. He does that a lot- interrupt without realizing. He doesn't mean to, his autism just makes him shit at social skills.

Oftentimes in conversations he's learned to infer a person's words before they say them, meaning that he completes their words in his head before they complete them out loud. In Foolish's case, Ranboo knew what he was going to say next.

In result, Ranboo responded to their words, just before they got a chance to actually say them.

“Sorry,” he blushes, “I didn’t mean to interrupt you.”

“It’s alright,” Foolish encourages, “What were you saying?”

“Oh, um just that I know you can use multiple sets.” Ranboo then realizes how incredibly self centered that sounds as a cis guy and scrambles to correct himself, “- not that, like, I have any right in that or anything. I just- well my friend, his older sibling, they use they/he/she pronouns and they use them interchangeably. I didn’t know you could just pick two.”

“Yeah,” Foolish says, “Yeah, you can.”

“Oh, cool,” Ranboo says, giving his therapist a double thumbs up. He’s sincere, really, but his words come out bland and thick. Which is why he gave the thumbs up, but gosh maybe that just seems mocking and jeez why does Ranboo really care how his therapist socially perceives him?

“Thanks,” Foolish says, “I really like my pronouns.”

“Yeah,” Ranboo says lamly, “Yeah.”

It is really cool though, Ranboo didn’t know pronouns worked like that. Hell if he had known, maybe he’d mess around with pronouns like that. Sounds fun, not solely being labeled as ‘he.’

Wait shit, is that insensitive to think? Maybe Ranboo isn’t supposed to want to use more than one set of pronouns because he’s a cis guy. He should probably stop thinking about that. He doesn’t want to be rude.

“Well, anyways,” he says awkwardly, pushing pronouns to the side.

Foolish smiles at him, and they say their goodbyes. Ranboo already has an appointment for the next week ready, so really, he’ll see Foolish in no time.

Here’s to hoping this therapy thing works out better than last time.

Chapter End Notes

I've had the worst month in a long time. But that's okay because recovery isn't linear. You can have bad days, bad weeks, bad months, bad years, and things can still be okay.

And that's why I write stories like this.

Also no need to worry about me it's been rough but I've been through way worse and getting thru hard things is my normal.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

Encompass Sandbox Project: The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

making marks

Chapter Summary

Ranboo sits down with a doctor to discuss his x-ray results. Any news is bad news, and there's quite a bit of news.

Chapter Notes

CW: past child abuse, discussion of broken bones, past rib trauma, tics, unknown medical conditions, dissociation, extreme anxiety, past (unintentional) suicide attempt, intense feelings of fear

Special thanks to Ari for sensitivity reading/beta-ing this chapter. You can find her at [teasdays](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo gets his x-ray scans back two days after his first therapy appointment and he gets to go back to the doctor and sits anxiously as he waits to go over them.

While he waits, he's stuck thinking. As a result, he can't sit still. He keeps shifting in his seat, humming as he does his best to calm down. Someone else in the waiting room gives him odd looks and Ranboo has the stark realization that she's staring at him, judging him. He tries to stop humming, but the anxiety just builds in his chest until he's forced to restart his low hum. He turns away from her and begins to rock. He does his best to ignore her.

He doesn't know what will happen when he gets results. Either answer he gets isn't going to be one he wants. No evidence of harm to his chest shows that there's no proof of child abuse. Which means Ranboo's probably created some fucked up memories just to explain his memory loss. It also means he's fought with Niki for no reason at all and she probably hates him now.

On the other hand, harm to his chest could prove Ranboo's memories right. It's a relieving thought, being able to depend on his faulty memory for once, but the reality is much harder to face. Because if there is that evidence, then well- it's likely Ranboo was abused. It's likely that his father did crush his ribs, performing CPR harshly on his own child in an attempt to put him through the same pain that his wife had been through.

Ranboo would live with the knowledge that he had been severely abused as a child.

He'd live with the knowledge that those incidents likely led to his memory loss.

He'd live with the knowledge that Niki had no idea and still seems to hold some fondness to their parents.

He'd live with the knowledge that his father- for all intents and purposes- tried to kill him.

So is there really a good answer to which result he'd prefer?

Eventually the doctor arrives. But doesn't the nurse usually take you back to a room? Not the doctor? Except, well Ranboo doesn't remember a nurse, nor being led back to this room. And hey, when did they even get back to this room?

He blinks, trying to get a hold of where he is and figure out how much time he's lost. The doctor's just introducing himself, so Ranboo probably didn't miss anything too important.

The doctor seems to be waiting for him to respond, so Ranboo fumbles through introductions. In no time at all, they seem to be discussing the scans.

"Do you see this line here?" the doctor says, "as well as the ones in this area here?"

Ranboo blinks, staring at the smattering of small gray lines all across his ribcage.

"Are those- are those all breaks?"

"No," the doctor quickly clarifies and Ranboo breathes a sigh of relief. God if all of those had been breaks- well it was way worse than Ranboo thought.

"-some of them are most likely fractures."

Ranboo's breath hitches, and he barely avoids choking on his own tongue.

"What?" he manages.

"The gray lines aren't just breaks, they're fractures as well. Or it's likely that they are. Most of these seem quite old, which can make it a bit hard to tell. It's also likely that you had more fractures or breaks that have completely faded and are no longer detectable. What did you say this scan was for again? Your papers don't clarify that."

"Uh," Ranboo says.

"This sort of rib trauma isn't uncommon in patients who've undergone CPR, but it's never this extreme-"

"Question for you," Ranboo interrupts, "could- could something like this cause memory issues?"

The doctor frowns.

"You mean broken and fractured ribs?"

Ranboo nods, leaning forward ever so slightly.

"No," the doctor says, and a flood of disappointment has Ranboo sinking. Well there goes that theory. "But," the doctor continues, "that isn't to say the two aren't related. CPR- assuming these are from CPR- is performed in cases where a person isn't breathing, right? In other words, no oxygen isn't getting to their brain. Depending on how long that person goes without oxygen, they certainly could experience brain damage that could lead to affecting the brain's ability to store and access memories."

Ranboo lets out a loud exhale, one that he's held in for the entire time the doctor's been speaking.

"In addition," the doctor says, "the trauma from the experience alone- that could certainly lead to memory issues."

Both those things describe Ranboo to a 'T'. He's never been more grateful for an explanation. He's also never not wanted an explanation more than he does right now.

"Oh," Ranboo says, trying to sound objective as if they aren't talking about his own brain and his own ribs, "interesting."

They talk a bit more but going over x-rays only takes so long and the doctor has other people to get to. Plus- well- Ranboo isn't really sure what more there is to discuss. He's not even quite sure what he wants to know.

He has the information he needs. He thinks. What more is there to discuss?

Nevermind that the information leaves him reeling, nevermind that he feels like he doesn't feel like himself anymore.

His body doesn't feel like his own, but some strange figure of the past. He feels like a play thing, something his father discarded and cast aside.

He puts his head to chest and feels his breath below ribs that have been cracked many, many times, and nothing feels like his.

His body doesn't feel like his.

He enters the apartment near tears.

He quickly gets Tubbo's attention from the living room and his concern comes immediately as he takes stock of Ranboo's body language.

Tubbo's, "Ranboo?" has Tommy poking his head out for his room and joining them all in the living room.

Ranboo falls to the ground next to the couch Tubbo's on. Tubbo leans over, pulling him back and smoothing his hair.

Tommy joins him on the ground, giving him a side hug and rubbing soothing circles on his knees.

"Hey boob boy," Tommy says, soft and gentle even with the teasing nickname, "what's going on?"

And Ranboo finally shares everything.

He's already shared a lot with them, but this time he holds nothing back.

He starts with his therapy, explains all the memories he's recovered from his therapy sessions with his previous therapist. From there he explains how when he fractured his wrist the doctor pointed out that there were numerous past breaks and fractures.

He talks about how this history connects to these memories he suddenly has of his father. He tells them how he called Niki and she had insisted he had never been abused. He shares how he set up the x-ray appointment, how Foolish brought up repressed memories and how Ranboo is sure- so, so sure, of what his father did to him.

He tells Tommy and Tubbo everything, holding nothing back.

"Well," Tommy says, "This- well- I mean it definitely would explain why your memory issues and dissociation is getting worse."

Ranboo nods, agreeing firmly.

Because it does, it all fits.

"And the not-suicide attempt," Tommy throws in.

Ranboo nods again.

"Okay," Tubbo says, "So where do you- where do we go from here?"

Turns out, the beginning of 'what the hell does Ranboo do now' starts with continuing therapy.

His next appointment with Foolish goes really well, even better than the first. To be honest, pretty much anything could be better than the first. Don't get Ranboo wrong, Foolish was amazing that first time, but his brain doing funky weird things was much less cool and incredibly stressful so Ranboo's okay putting that in the past.

His second session with Foolish they talk about Ranboo.

Which makes sense because it's Ranboo in therapy so of course they talk about Ranboo, but- like- Ranboo gets to talk about parts of himself. He gets to tell Foolish about his friends and family, about growing up in foster care, and about how he's doing in university.

It's sort of strange because Ranboo's used to having adults know everything about him, handing a file of all his mistakes in full form before meeting them.

But Foolish, Foolish knows nothing about him.

Ranboo could completely lie to him and Foolish would have no idea.

He's not going to, obviously, but the option is there. That option is freeing.

He starts with talking about Niki.

"I grew up with Niki in foster care," he explains, "We had a really nice family for a while, we stayed with them for about four years. Niki aged out but they let her stay for a bit- they were really good to us.

"Eventually she moved on. She was working and putting herself through university, so after she completed her community college credits, she moved away.

"She wanted to stay close," Ranboo remembers, "for me- but well, she didn't have money and she got a really good scholarship offer so she took it. She- she took it so she could get her degree, get her own place, and then take me in."

"How old were you then?" Foolish asks.

Ranboo shrugs, and fiddles with the fidget cube he actually remembered to bring with him this time.

"I was like- seven maybe? I'm twelve years younger than her."

"That's certainly an age gap," Foolish notes.

"Yeah," Ranboo agrees, "I'm pretty sure my parents didn't think they could have kids anymore and then- boom, out I came."

"Why do you think that?" Foolish asks.

"I dunno, they just- I dunno- they never wanted me."

"Can you explain that?"

So Ranboo does. He explains the memories he's started to recover and explains what Niki has told him about their parents and he even explains how Niki and him are fighting about it.

He speaks about all that has been going on without hesitation because Foolish is just so easy to talk to. He oozes sincerity and comfort that is a bit reminiscent of Niki but without the guilt Ranboo feels when venting to her.

It's sort of amazing.

He leaves that session feeling so much better than he has in weeks.

They haven't discussed Ranboo's memories, nor the x-ray scan that Ranboo has yet to address. Two weeks ago, Ranboo would have been anxious, pushing to know but for some reason in this case, he's okay waiting.

It's a hard session, it leaves him drained. But it's so good and it feels so good.

When he gets home that evening, Tommy and Tubbo apparently even have a surprise for him.

"So," Tubbo says, "we know you've had a shit ton of bullshit going on lately."

"And-" Tommy interrupts, impatient and excited as always, "We know that- THAT THAT'S POGGERS- you love animals."

"So pretty much the school does this thing where-"

"We get to pet puppies tomorrow!"

Ranboo blinks, trying to figure out how any of this is connected and how the hell puppies are involved. Not that he's complaining, of course.

"What?" Ranboo asks.

Tommy's no help, jumping up and down on his tiptoes, hum in his throat as he flaps his hand and shakes his head. Every part of his body is a wild form of a happy stim.

Ranboo unconsciously mirrors him, giving his own toe bounces and head shakes.

But the stim party does nothing to explain their words, which is where Tubbo jumps in.

"Basically the school brings in therapy puppies in training and stuff every once in a while. According to an email I got because I actually checked my school email for once. So tomorrow, we get to go see and pet puppies!" Tubbo explains.

And okay, okay what could be better than puppies! Ranboo loves dogs, loves pets and animals in general and he's not ashamed to admit that he downright squeals at the announcement.

It's a weird squeal and yiping noise, a sound that sits in his throat and then has Ranboo stimming by repeating a 'bap bap bap' noise. He groans deep in his throat and repeats it.

Two years ago he'd be ashamed to make the noises he is, but now- now things are different.

Already Tommy's stimming with him, copying the 'bap' noise. The tandem stimming excites Ranboo further and he flaps his hands hard, getting all the overwhelming positive emotions released in a healthy way. Tommy and him are twin stimming storms. Tubbo watches them happily, even throwing in his own small hand flaps.

Honestly, that means more to Ranboo than Tommy and his own stimming, because Ranboo knows Tubbo doesn't stim in the same ways they do. Tubbo doesn't have the need to stim the same way autistic- Ranboo- and ADHD- Tommy- individuals do. But Tubbo stims with them

anyways, copying the movement not to tease, but to participate in something that's important to them.

They all stim together for a good while in that semi-frantic way that almost goes past enjoyment and tipping into a craze of excess energy that can only be released by stimming.

A half hour later, when Ranboo's calmed to something more manageable and the only stimming he's doing is small bounces and rocks, Tubbo gives him a gentle smile.

"I'm assuming this is a yes to the puppies?"

Ranboo nods fiercely.

"Awesome."

"Oh and how was therapy?" Tommy asks, coming in with the topic switch of the century.

Ranboo nods again and organizes his thoughts, bringing to mind what he wants to say.

But then, then he can't. He can't speak. All he can do is hum and he doesn't know how to explain it.

"Ranboo?" Tommy asks after a moment.

Ranboo shakes his head to indicate a 'no' and continues to hum. He doesn't know how else to explain his predicament.

"Uhhhh," Tommy says, obviously not understanding. Tubbo doesn't seem to get it either.

Continuing to hum, Ranboo lifts a hand to his throat and taps it in a pattern repeatedly.

"Oh!" Tubbo says, "Did you go nonverbal?"

'No,' Ranbioo wants to say. 'I just can't talk.'

And then he realizes- oh wait, that's exactly what nonverbal is. He doesn't remember ever having gone nonverbal before but this is certainly that.

He nods instead.

"Okay," Tubbo says, "Are you okay?"

The question floods Ranboo with serotonin. He suddenly feels like he's wrapped up in a tight blanket that just came out of a dryer. He's warm and cozy, and at home. Something in him whines at the question, at the care behind it.

Tubbo cares about him, Tommy too, and Ranboo can see it so obviously in their eyes, words, and postures. It's so sweet it makes Ranboo sick and he fills his head with warm cotton.

Suddenly all he wants to do is lay on the couch and cuddle his friends and watch cartoons.

But he can't vocalize that, so with an odd lump in his throat, he carefully drags his friends to the couch and buries in between them. He grabs the remote but there's a bit of fuzz in his brain and his eyes don't quite want to stay focused, making the screen hard to read and decipher. Instead of trying to do it himself, he passes the remote to Tommy and snuggles into his shoulder, presses his face in the space where his arm meets his chest.

He hums, and lets himself drift off, a smile stretched across face and both of his hands wrapped around each of his friends. He never fully drifts off, not exactly, but he does drift. It sort of feels like a mix between dissociation and sleeping because instead of the soft cotton of sleep or the heavy wool of dissociation, he feels more like he's floating.

He lets it happen.

Later that night, when Tommy and Tubbo turn off the TV, he keeps his eyes closed and doesn't move. He's not asleep, but he doesn't- well he doesn't want to get up. Tubbo gently shakes his side and Tommy whispers his name but Ranboo's not ready to be done floating so he sinks deeper in the couch.

Tommy says something- Ranboo's only half listening- and then he's being picked up.

That almost ends the charade right there, with Ranboo so close to startling and moving to grip onto a more steady surface. But at the last moment, he remembers he's supposed to be asleep, and stays still. He counts his breaths in his head, making sure they're deep and even. He opens his eyes, just barely, just enough that he can see a hazy grayness of the world through his eyelashes and maybe make out part of an arm holding him.

He closes his eyes again. He wonders who carries him. Tommy's taller and therefore is more likely to manage his gangly body better, but Tubbo is strong in a way neither Tommy and Ranboo are, and the forearms beneath him seem firm, solid.

It's probably Tubbo.

It's okay though, because Ranboo's not that-

He cuts his own thoughts off because he was about to think that he wasn't that big, that he wasn't that tall but that's absurd and a fucking lie to boot. Poor Tubbo.

Ranboo almost feels bad, but a greater part of him doesn't want this to end so he continues to fake sleep.

He's set on his bed, and manhandled gently, one shoe off and then the other before the covers are pulled out from under him and gently over him. A hand brushes his hair out of his eyes, doing its best attempt to tuck it behind his ears. The attempt fails, because Ranboo's hair is at that odd length where it's constantly falling in his face but isn't quite long enough to stay behind his ears. Either way, the person tries again.

They fail again, but it's the act that matters. And it's the act of doing the act twice that matters.

Ranboo smiles.

“Night Boo,” Tubbo whispers, and Tommy echoes. Moments later he hears his door shutting.

His smile grows, and he reaches around, grabbing hold of his spare pillow and cuddling it close. Something in him aches and loosens in a way that’s so painful but so good. He doesn’t know what it is, or how to describe it. But he doesn’t need to worry about that right now.

He clutches the pillow close, holding it tight against his body. It’s close enough that his fingers touch against his mouth and Ranboo can feel his breath warm them slightly.

His smile turns from a normal smile to a goofy grin, and before he’s even aware of what’s happening, Ranboo’s asleep.

The next morning brings puppies. Or actually- it does the opposite of bringing puppies. As it is, the puppies are in a certain location and Tommy, Tubbo, and Ranboo will be bringing themselves to the puppies.

It’s exciting in every way that is exciting, and Ranboo gets pulled into it all.

Tommy starts to tap his foot rapidly against the ground as he slowly watches the minutes tick by on his phone.

Tubbo gets caught up in the excitement with him, grinning and laughing and asking if they can take a puppy home with them.

Ranboo on the other hand, struggles. Ranboo thinks it’s probably his own fault. Ranboo’s excited too- that part is obvious- but it seems that his excitement is starting to overflow into that area where everything is too much too much too much and no longer does the excitement feel good, but painful, his emotions warping and twisting until he’s bordering a shutdown.

Tubbo convinces him to go to his room and shut the blinds, and Tommy reminds him to check his memory book for what to do when he has shutdowns. He heeds both of their advice and ducks away.

According to his memory book, music and closing his eyes in a dark room helps with times like these, especially if he can have a silent fidget in his hand. So he puts in his earbuds, starts up Lemon Demon, and grabs a tangle that sits on his bed stand. He does his best to slow his breath, counting them out and doing his best to relax.

By the time his alarm goes off for needing to leave the apartment, Ranboo’s emotions have calmed down to something a little more manageable.

When he leaves his room, Tommy and Tubbo are waiting. Tommy’s practically vibrating at the door but he doesn’t pounce at Ranboo, doesn’t even call his name and if the off-focused focused gaze is anything to go by, he’s suppressing his tics.

Ranboo appreciates the thought, because he knows Tommy is doing this for him, trying to reduce his own excitement to something as unobtrusive as possible. The not shouting, the not pouncing on him, that's a perk. Ranboo appreciates Tommy thinking about his boundaries.

But he really really doesn't need to suppress his tics. Nor should he.

He decides to mention as much.

"You don't need to suppress your tics," Ranboo mumbles, a whistle escaping Tommy the second he finishes his thought.

He catches the confused look that Tubbo does his best not to send in his direction. And gosh okay Ranboo really appreciates his friends trying not to overwhelm him but they can also have their own needs met. Tommy can tic. Tubbo can ask for things to be repeated.

His friends are so sweet, but so goddam dumb sometimes.

He doesn't get the chance to repeat himself for Tubbo before Tommy's banging his head against Tubbo's.

"Ow!" Tubbo yelps at the same time as Tommy's own, "Shit. Balls."

Ranboo snorts at the action because well, it really isn't funny and he shouldn't be snorting at all, but Ranboo has always been one to react oddly to pain.

He doesn't feel like it's funny, but he always ends up snorting or giggling or straight up laughing when someone gets hurt and he doesn't know why. It isn't funny, it's just something he does.

Which is also apparently an autism thing. Another thing he's always done that finally has an explanation to it.

He quickly covers his mouth to hide said snorts, hoping he looks more worried and concerned than like he's laughing at his friends.

It's not really needed considering neither of the two of them are paying him any attention. Plus, even if they were, they know Ranboo's tendency to laugh at pain and that he doesn't think it's actually funny.

Tommy and Tubbo are both rubbing their heads. Tommy's wincing painfully as Tubbo uses his free hand to readjust his hearing aid.

"I really hope that isn't a tic that's sticking around," Tommy remarks

"You and me both bossman," Tubbo grumbles. He isn't angry at Tommy though, Ranboo knows it. It's nice knowing Tubbo well enough to know that.

Tubbo lets his hand drop from both his head and his hearing aid. He hasn't adjusted it perfectly it seems, because it lets out a quiet whistle noise. It's one that grates in Ranboo's nerves, worse than a tea kettle hiss, but just as common.

"Ears are whistling," Ranboo remarks and Tubbo readjust his hearing aid again. This time when he pulls his hand away, it's silent.

Tommy's still rubbing his head.

"Are you okay?" Tubbo asks Tommy.

Wait, hey- that's a good question to ask. Ranboo should have probably asked that question considering he's the one who wasn't hurt at all in this scenario.

"Yeah," Tommy huffs, head jerking slightly, "ready for some cuddling with puppies, that's for sure.

And oh right! That's what they're doing! Ranboo had completely forgotten in the moment, much too focused on what was happening now then to try to recall what they were doing.

His memory is shit and his brain can only hold so much energy and information at once.

They go to cuddle the puppies. And unfortunately they've only walked a few minutes down the street, headed towards the campas when that barbed cottony feeling starts to fill his head again.

He blinks, and stumbles, taking in the world like everything is in slow motion. He sees everything around him, can see Tubbo and Tommy chatting at his side, but he doesn't hear them. Not really.

He feels like a passenger in his own body.

"Hey," he distantly recognizes himself saying, the single word echoing in his own brain. "I'm, uh, I'm dissociating," he manages.

A hand goes to his back. He's pretty sure he hears a voice talking. He's not sure if it's Tubbo or Tommy.

They're probably saying something important, Ranboo just can't tell what.

Ranboo swallows and a sudden terrifying dread flows through his body. It's like ice being stabbed through his veins. The terror hits him quick, fast, and is all consuming. He stumbles, comes to a stop.

He's panting, heaving, poking around desperately but still unable to see anything. Or he can see everything- he can visually see- but he can't see, he can't understand, process, or decipher any of the visual information being fed to his brain.

Why is he so scared? Why does he feel so scared?

His heart is pounding and he can't stop shuffling his toes and he feels sweat start to build on his body as his mouth goes dry. His limbs all feel rock heavy for his body.

Tommy or Tubbo says something again.

What are they saying?

"What?" Ranboo barely manages around how parched he suddenly is.

"Do you-" he hears, and then he's drifting again.

He scrambles for some kind of purchase in the hazy sea of cotton that he's stuck in. He finds a physical anchor in the form of an arm. It's probably Tommy's, it doesn't have any muscle to it.

"What?" he says again.

"Do you want to go home?" Tommy repeats again.

At least Ranboo can hear him now, even if he can't really see him, even if he isn't really there.

Ranboo still feels like he's drowning in fear. He tightens his grip on Tommy's arm.

"Where are we?" He asks.

What are they doing here? Where are they? Who is he with? What's going on? What's happening? Why is Ranboo so scared? What's happening, what's wrong, why is he scared, what's going on he's so, so scared.

"Hey, deep breaths," the voice encourages. It's Tommy's voice. Right. Tommy. "You're with Tubbo and me- Tommy. We were- hey mate, you're okay mate- We were headed to campus to see puppies. You're Ranboo, and you're dissociating. That's okay, and you're okay. You're safe. It might be scary right now, but I promise you're safe. Do you understand that?"

Ranboo's still sweating, but it's cold, and he's terrified. He's so scared and he doesn't even know why. He's tense and curled in trying to take up as little space as possible while also making sure he's ready to book it if he needs to.

He doesn't know why he'd need to.

He's so scared.

"You're safe," Tommy repeats, "it's Tommy and Tubbo, you're Ranboo. You're dissociating. It's scary right now, but you will be okay."

Ranboo is so, so scared.

But Tommy is saying he's safe and Ranboo trusts Tommy.

Tommy says it's okay to be scared but he doesn't need to be.

And Ranboo trusts Tommy.

Ever so slightly he feels himself uncurl, clammy hands loosening their pressure.

"There we go bossman," Tubbo encourages, "you're okay. We're okay."

Ranboo's still out of it, blinking widely as if the world is a photograph that'll come into focus if he changes the camera settings enough. But it doesn't settle, it's still a haze.

But at least he isn't so scared.

"Do you want to go home?" Tommy asks.

Ranboo admits it sounds appealing, but there's something in him, something driving him to not go home. What are they doing here again?

"What- why- where are we going?" he asks.

"To pet some puppies,* Tubbo explains, "on campus."

Oh.

Oh Ranboo likes puppies. He really likes puppies.

He'd like to pet the puppies please.

"Can we, can we let the puppies?" he asks, almost shy, as if the other two would suddenly say no.

"Are you sure you're- pog, hey!- up to it?" Tommy asks.

Ranboo nods eagerly. He wants to see the puppies please.

"Alright," Tommy says.

"Will you tell us if it's too much?" Tubbo asks.

Ranboo nods, but he's confident that it won't be too much. It's puppies! He loves puppies! And puppies turn into dogs and dogs can be big and scary and can scare things away.

Maybe they can scare away all the bad feelings Ranboo has. That would be nice. He'd really, really like that.

The world's still fuzzy but he has Tommy and Tubbo at his sides and he gets to pet puppies.

He's okay. He'll be okay.

He needs to be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Ye Ranboo has some times in this one. but hey puppies next chapter!!

Unfortunately, I think I have a new baseline of chronic pain/illness that's worse than it used to be.

Fortunately, understanding and accepting that means I'm figuring out my new normal and feeling a lot more stable.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[Encompass Sandbox Project](#): The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

[encompass: the sandbox](#): encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

[encompass: behind the scenes](#): an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

alive, aware, a lot

Chapter Summary

Ranboo does a lot of therapy and a lot of processing. He's doing a lot and a lot is a lot and it may be a good a lot but it's still a lot and sometimes a lot is too much a lot for any person to reasonably handle.

It's a good thing we have coping skills.

It's a bad thing we aren't aware of those coping skills.

Chapter Notes

CW: extreme stress, ableism, unknown medical condition, memory issues, lost time, depression, fears of continuing abuse cycles

no beta for this chap so we hope for the best lol

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The puppies cheer him up a lot and he sits on the ground as two of them squirm on top of him.

One licks his chin and he blinks, watching as color seeps fully into his vision and he grounds himself in the present.

It's a world of difference, and he lets his hands thread through the puppies fur as he adjusts.

"You good?" Tubbo checks in, watching him blink and look around as he pets his own puppy, a small brown speckled thing.

Ranboo nods, and clings to the black and white puppy he has close to him.

He picks her up, presses his face into her fur, and nods again. He's okay. This is okay.

Later, as they're leaving, Ranboo builds up the courage to talk to the workers coordinating everything. Ranboo hates socializing and it's so incredibly awkward but- but he loves dogs and these puppies were so sweet and he'd love to learn more about them.

The young adults seem all too happy with his questions and passionately answer them, explaining their organization, and shoving pamphlets in his arm. They also explain to him

that the group does all sorts of dog training and adoption, that some of their dogs go down the service dog route, while others are filtered out to either therapy animals or just eventually being adopted. It's all fascinating and Ranboo asks tons of questions.

"What about those puppies, which group are these?" he asks.

They explain that these ones will usually be therapy dogs, that they like training their service dogs early, but some of them may end up going that route. Sometimes these dogs can make good psychiatric service dogs.

"Psychiatric service dogs?" Ranboo asks, because he's heard of seeing eye dogs before and things like dogs for deaf people but he's never heard of a psychiatric service dog.

The woman nods enthusiastically.

"Yup," she agrees, "there's all sorts of different types of service dogs and one type is a psychiatric service dog. Sometimes they specialize in PTSD but many are also general for severe mood disorders, anxiety, and other disabilities. Dogs can be a really good friend to people struggling with psychiatric disabilities as well as being an encouragement to stick around.

"Plus dogs can sense things before even we can, in addition to being a trustworthy partner. Psychiatric service dog tasks can vary immensely, especially because there's so much variance in psychiatric disabilities."

"What about, um, what about memory issues," Ranboo says, and he's not even sure why he does. "Uh- could you- memory issue?"

She laughs.

"Well I'd buy a planner first, before getting a service dog" she jokes. Ranboo feels cold. It's- fuck he hates how nonchalant- Ranboo doesn't just- heck. Memory issues are more than that. At least his are

He doesn't- he doesn't forget things like most people do. He's not thoughtless, something slipping from his mind. His memory, his brain doesn't work properly.

It's different. Why does no one get it's different?

All of a sudden, Tommy's at his side.

"But what about memory difficulties that classify as a disability," Tommy presses, "there's certainly cases of that."

"Oh of course," the woman immediately agrees, "there are a lot of things service dogs can do in regards to severe memory loss and recall issues."

She continues to ramble on, and Ranboo absorbs every word. He does his best to commit to memory so he can write it down in his memory book later. He'd pull it out now but he doesn't

want to pull his attention away even for a minute and he's terrified of seeming rude. But it's a lot and he's scared he'll forget things.

So the moment they do finally stumble away from the puppy place, Ranboo's pulling out his memory book and looking for a pen.

"I took notes," Tommy says, "on my phone. I- just killed a woman- no I didn't actually do that. I meant I can send the notes to you."

Ranboo sighs in relief and stops his frantic and fruitless search for a pen.

"Y'know," Tubbo pitches in. Ranboo almost jumps at his voice, he's been so strangely quiet, "you like dogs."

"I do," Ranboo agrees.

"And you were asking about service dogs."

Ranboo nods. It was really interesting! He didn't even know psychiatric service dogs were a thing.

"Have you- are you considering getting one? A service dog that is?"

Ranboo blinks.

Oh. No. He hadn't thought of that.

Looking back it's obvious, the signs are all there it makes sense why he asked. But truly, Ranboo hadn't been thinking about that, hadn't put the pieces together.

For some reason, the idea leaves him with a bitter taste in his mouth. He hums, and then raps his nails against his chest.

"You good?" Tommy asks, very familiar with Ranboo's anxious stims.

Ranboo nods and continues home with them.

He has stuff to think about. Or rather, stuff not to think about.

And speaking of stuff not to think about, the rash on his hands is definitely getting worse and Ranboo's at the point where he needs to do something about it.

He told Tubbo he would a little while ago, but had never followed through. He knew it was important, that there could be something actually wrong, but figuring out what to do, much less following through and actually doing it takes way more energy than Ranboo has on a good day.

And he hasn't been having a lot of good days recently.

The white rash has crept along his hands and covers it in splotches now. But the turning point was when Ranboo noticed it on the corner of his elbows, in between his toes, and at the corners of his mouth.

He thinks maybe this isn't a rash, but something much, much worse.

He doesn't know where to start.

In the end, the way he starts is sitting down in the chair across from Foolish, jittery and bouncing his legs and explaining that he needs help getting a doctor's appointment.

Foolish can help him do that, right?

It turns out, Foolish can.

And it's- it's surprisingly easy. It's incredibly simple actually. Because Ranboo already has a primary physician, someone that Niki had helped him set up and find when he moved, so all Ranboo needed to do was call and set up an appointment.

The office had given him available times and he picked one and that was... that was it.

They already have his medical history and insurance because he went through all that before, he must of, even if he doesn't remember it.

So he gets a doctor's appointment.

It's after that's the hard part.

"Do you think you can describe to me what you're feeling right now?" Foolish pushes gently when Ranboo continues to press his face tightly into his hands.

He squeezes his hands tightly around his hair and shakes his head.

"Alright," Foolish says, "that's okay, we have time."

Ranboo takes a few deep breaths in the way Foolish and him have been practicing. It seems silly that a few bits of breathing can do anything at all, but Ranboo truly begins to unwind. He reminds himself that he needs to practice being vulnerable.

"I would usually ask Niki to help me with this sort of thing," he admits.

"You're still not talking to Niki," Foolish observes.

Ranboo shakes his head. He doesn't trust himself to get the words out.

"And-"

"I really don't want to talk about Niki right now," Ranboo says abruptly, pulling the conversation to a halt. He begins to pull at the fingers on his hands.

Foolish studies him for a moment, and then nods.

"Alright," he says, "well, if you don't want to talk about Niki, I actually had a few questions for you."

Ranboo nods to show he's listening.

"Have you ever thought about your own identity?"

Ranboo frowns, eyebrows creasing together. He considers Foolish's words as he looks around the room, but taking that time doesn't seem to help him understand what Foolish is saying any more than when he first said it.

"What?" Ranboo says, "sorry I just, what do you mean?"

"Your identity," Foolish says, "the parts of you that make you, you. Have you thought about that before?"

Ranboo blinks.

"Uhhhhh," he stutters, "I'm- I'm Ranboo."

"Awesome," Foolish says, and he seems genuinely excited and proud at the prospect of Ranboo being himself. "And who is Ranboo?"

Oh.

Oh that's a question. Huh.

Ranboo is...

Ranboo is Ranboo.

He's awkward and weird and never fits in and he's Niki's brother even though he's not sure he really wants to think about her right now. He has memory issues and he's autistic and he has two best friends and he likes animals and he was in foster care and he was abused.

He's a survivor of abuse and he's disabled and he struggles a lot. He's getting help and he set up a doctor's appointment for himself- albeit not by himself- and he's trying to do better.

Ranboo's, Ranboo.

He's just a guy.

Except fuck that doesn't feel right. That's not- gosh this whole identity topic is weird. What does Foolish mean, who is Ranboo?

What is there to know? He's him.

He brings it up later when he's back at home and the session is finally behind him.

"Therapy's stupid," Ranboo complains, for once actually doing his university homework. He's very behind at the moment but most of his professors have been incredibly understanding and

he's talked to disability services about getting an update on his time extension accommodations. Thank god for having an university that actually has a good disabled students program.

"That I can get behind," Tommy agrees, doing whatever it is he's doing.

"What?" Tubbo pitches in, looking up from his computer, "what did you say?"

"Ranboo said therapy is stupid, I agreed," Tommy explains.

Tubbo narrows his eyes and shoots glares at them both.

"Therapy is good for your brains, you dumbasses. Gets all that shit working a bit more smoothly, making sure it gets maintenance done."

"Are you working on a build project?" Ranboo asks, because the words Tubbo's using are the ones he does when talking about the machinery at his internship.

Tubbo narrows his eyes.

"Maybe," he allows. He types a few more things, and then pushes his computer to the side. "And why's therapy stupid?"

"Foolish wants to know who I am," Ranboo whined, "and that's- how am I supposed to explain to him who I am?"

Tubbo frowns, and when Ranboo glances over at Tommy to see if he would be any more help, he shrugs.

Go figure .

Guess Ranboo has to figure out who he is all by himself. Sounds difficult.

"I'm autistic," he says abruptly, "and uh- I like pets."

"You're funny," Tommy pitched in, "and have- hey!- a shit memory."

"You're a young man-" Tubbo begins to add and Ranboo cringes at the phrasing. He's not the only one, seeing Tommy's face screw up in disgust over the description. It does sound a bit like something a grandma would say when seeing their grandchildren after a year apart.

"Okay fine!" Tubbo says, obviously having noticed their faces, "I'll change the wording. You're a young dude guy person- better?- and you're fun to be around and give great hugs."

"Oh," Ranboo says, "I do?"

Tubbo nods in confirmation.

"Yeah," he agrees, "you do."

Ranboo starts to feel a little more like himself, whoever that is.

Unfortunately, with progress comes backsliding. Ranboo's finally starting to feel a little bit more like himself which means he's doing better- he's even started doing homework again.

It's all going well until one morning where he wakes up with the feeling of the weight of the world on his chest. He feels like he can't breathe and for a few moments he's certain he's a kid again, being choked out by his father.

His alarm's going off and it's only the familiar tone of the phone that reminds him he's not a kid anymore. But he can't remember why his phone is ringing or what that means so he rolls over in bed and goes back to sleep.

He's too tired to get up today.

He's too tired to get up today. Apparently Tommy and Tubbo didn't get the memo.

"C'mon Boo," Tubbo encourages, "let's see those eyeballs, want to see the pigmentation on top of white veiny things."

"Don't describe them like that," Tommy hisses, "You're gonna make him not want to get up."

"Have you ever thought about how eyeballs would taste? I think they'd probably be squishy and rubbery on the outside and you'd have to really bite in and then they go pop and from there it's mostly goop. Kind of like a pimple."

"Gross," Tommy complains, "Why would you- POP- Why- POP POP- Tubbo I swear to god if you gve me a p- POP POP- popping- POP- tic I am going to murder you."

"Fair enough," Tubbo agrees, "but keep me alive long enough to help with Ranboo."

At the mention of his name, Ranboo feels like the world is ending like everything is on his shoulders, like he can't breathe from the pressure.

Even so, he smiles at how ridiculous his friends are.

"There's that smile," Tommy cheers, "now c'mon, open those eyes. You promised us you would try to get up again later. And guess what, it's later now."

Ranboo remembers making no such promise but that really doesn't mean anything. Reluctantly, he opens his eyes. Tommy's and Tubbo's faces meet his and instantly a mild burning begins to pool at the corner of his cheeks.

He's already starting to cry. He's already starting to cry and he doesn't even know why.

"Aw Boo," Tubbo says, "what's wrong?"

Ranboo curls in on himself. How does he explain that everything's wrong?

"Okay," Tommy says, "okay, is there anything we can do?"

Ranboo miserably shakes his head.

Almost immediately he's met with a gentle hand running through his hair. Ranboo startles slightly at the pressure before sinking into. It makes all the awfulness a little bit better.

"I'm worried," Tommy admits, "I'm worried about you."

That only makes Ranboo feel worse, a sinking feeling in his chest because he doesn't want his friends to feel bad for him. He's so sick of people taking care of him.

With a jolt Ranboo realizes what exactly this reminds him of.

His mom. He reminds himself of his mom, laying in bed all day unable to get up and refusing to talk to anyone.

He doesn't want to be like his mom. He doesn't want to be like his mom because his mom was sick and she was so sick that she could never be there for him and Ranboo deserved a mother and he never got one.

He can't turn into his mom because when his mom got bad so did his dad and his dad took it out on him and Niki had to be responsible for a little brother while also going through school and it wasn't fair.

He can't turn into his mom because his mom had been miserable, could barely look at him, and continuously tried to take her own life.

He can't turn into his mom.

He can't turn into his mom.

He thinks he is anyway.

What he can do is bury his head back in his pillow. He sleeps through most of the day.

He'd sleep through the next day to except for the fact that he has therapy and Tubbo and Tommy's concern is growing.

So somehow, he stumbles out of bed and to Foolish's office.

"Hello!" Foolish grins, and Ranboo weakly nods.

"How's your week been?" Foolish asks, if they don't have an idea already by how Ranboo's acting.

Ranboo shrugs.

His entire life feels like therapy these days. He really is turning into his mom.

"You don't know? Foolish asks, "Don't want to explain? Don't know how to explain?"

Ranboo shrugs again.

"Okay," Foolish says, "Well is there anything you wanted to talk about today?"

Ranboo could respond- should respond- but he's just so, so tired. He got to therapy, that's impressive enough as is. He's not in a place to actually talk about his feelings.

"Hmm," Foolish says. The hum is pensive, reflective instead of judgemental. Ranboo echoes it, enjoying how the sound sits in his throat. Foolish smiles as he vocal stims.

Ranboo gives a small flap of his hands at the approval. It's still hard to stim in front of others, to stop masking. It's easier around people he's close to, and apparently that is slowly being extended to his therapist.

Is it a bit sad that Ranboo considers himself close to his therapist, or is that showing that they have a healthy therapist-client relationship? Heck if Ranboo knows.

"Not much for talking today, huh?" Foolish remarks.

Ranboo shakes his head.

"Alright," Foolish says, "well, if you want, we can play a game?"

A game? What type of game? Ranboo likes games.

"I have a bunch of them," Foolish explains, opening a cabinet. Sure enough it's full of boxes of games. "If you want you can pick any one you want. We can just play a game today."

Really? That seems- well that seems counter- counter- well counter something. Ranboo doesn't really know. Words are hard and he's already forgotten. He wants to play a game!

He gets off the couch, scooting across the ground to where the open cabinet is, and carefully flips through the games.

Trouble, Candy Land, Shoots and Ladders, Life, Sorry. There's so many options.

With an excited hum, Ranboo pulls out Sorry.

He likes that game! And he can be a fun color.

Foolish lights up at his choice and helps him set the game up.

Ranboo should be able to do it himself but he's excited and it's making his hands all clumsy so he knocks a few things over. But it's all okay because Foolish gets them set back up again for him.

Ranboo chooses red because it's a really good color. Foolish chooses yellow, which isn't as good but it's okay. It's a color Foolish likes and that makes it cool.

Foolish is super cool.

It's set up quickly, and then they finally get to play the game.

It's a little confusing and Ranboo doesn't remember Sorry being this hard before. Foolish is really flexible and doesn't get upset with him, but Ranboo gets a bit upset with himself.

He keeps counting wrong or forgetting which cards do what. He blames it on not playing it in a while.

The game takes them quite a bit of time and Ranboo's favorite part is whenever Foolish lands on one of the slides. Beaches when they do, they hold their figure down and slide it across the board making a 'wheeee' noise each time.

Ranboo giggles at the noise because it's silly and it makes him happy. He flaps his hands some more.

They play one full round- Ranboo doesn't remember who won- and then start another.

"Hey Ranboo," Foolish probes gently, "how are you feeling now?"

Ranboo gives him a smile, and hopes Foolish can't see the shadows behind- and under- his eyes. He's doing better, not great but better. He'd like to go back to playing the game.

"Do you think we can talk about what's going on right now? Not necessarily what happened earlier, but what you're feeling right now."

What Ranboo's feeling now?

Well earlier Ranboo was all sad and cold and worried but now Ranboo's doing great! He got to play some fun games with Foolish who is really really nice and helps him with all the difficult game rules.

It's a ton of fun playing with Foolish.

So Ranboo feels good now, nice and floaty and smooth and happy and peaceful.

It feels peaceful in the good way. Ranboo never gets to feel peaceful in the good way.

Ranboo doesn't want to think about what he's feeling anymore.

"I'm asking," Foolish says, "because it seems like you're having fun playing the game. And you also seem to be acting-"

"Game," he protests, "no- no therapy. Therapy scary. Don't want scary now."

Ranboo doesn't want to do therapy. He wants to play the game. He's having fun playing the game.

"Okay," Foolish agrees, "but I'm right here if you do want to talk, okay? And if you think you're up to talking even just a little before you go, that might be good. You can always talk to me about anything."

Ranboo is not up to even talking a little bit before he leaves.

He goes home and he almost misses his bus cause- well he knows what bus he should get on but everything seems a little harder, a little more confusing, and a little more distracting.

But he doesn't miss his bus which is a win in his book. He rides in the back because he thinks it's more fun back there, you get to be taller- even though he's already really tall- and see everyone else and also it usually gets more whiplash which means it's bumpier and if Ranboo pretends hard enough it's kinda like a roller coaster.

He kicks his legs absentmindedly and narrowly avoids missing his stop.

He scrambles off the bus, giggling at his own forgetfulness and half skips, half walks home. He hums under his breath and watches the plants around him.

He fumbles a bit with his keys at the door, frowning when his finger can't quite hold them right. Eventually he jams his key in, only to find that it's the wrong one and fumble for the next.

Eventually, finally, he gets the door open, once again giggling at his own struggle.

As things are, the minute he opens his apartment door, his smile instantly drops.

It makes no sense why it does. It's not like something bad happened when he enters his apartment. In fact everything's normal, if a bit on the silent side. Ranboo doesn't see Tommy or Tubbo anywhere, but that's not too unusual.

Even so, he can't help but try and wipe his smile away.

Standing in his own apartment, he can't help but think about how odd he's acting, about his giggling and playing games in therapy and feeling all light and uncomplicated.

Before he can think much longer, the door he had just closed opens. Ranboo whirls around to find Tubbo pushing his way into the door Tommy right behind him.

"Hey" Tubbo greets, "Did you just get back too?"

Ranboo curls a bit into himself and nods. He feels sort of like he's hiding something but he's not.

"Awesome," Tommy says, "how was therapy?"

"Good," Ranboo says. But honestly, he's not sure if it was. He just- if he starts talking about it... then...

Well he's not sure what comes next but it makes him nervous.

"Glad it was good," Tubbo says, and that makes Ranboo feel guilty because it wasn't good and now he's lying to Tubbo.

"It wasn't good," he mumbles.

"Repeat that?" Tubbo asks.

"It wasn't good," Ranboo admits, "I dunno, it was hard and I- I felt- it was too much."

"-Hey mate, you alright?- Too much like your last therapist?" Tommy probes gently.

Ranboo shakes his head.

"No!" he protests, "no Foolish is- they're really great. Really really great."

"Good."

"It's just- it was hard..so me and Foolish, we played some games. Uh, not talk. Just games today." Ranboo continues to slur slightly on his words trying to figure out how to best put them together in sentences that make sense. Strangely he's finding it to be harder than usual.

"Yeah, it seems like it was a bit rough," Tubbo agrees.

Ranboo frowns.

"How you know?" he asks.

Tubbo shrugs.

"You're just acting like it a bit bossman, you get that way. Y'know, but more timid and scared and quiet but also loud sometimes to cover it up."

"I do?" Ranboo asks, because he had never noticed that.

"Yeah," Tommy pitches in, "you do. But this is a bit different I think."

Ranboo blushes and shoves his face in his hands and he's not even sure why. He doesn't want to do that! Tommy's words just made him feel a lot and he's not even sure what about them did that.

It's just, that is how Ranboo is feeling! He's a little bit overwhelmed and off and everything's just a lot.

But- but instead soft fuzzy the way he sometimes gets he got even more this time.

He's got- he's gotten weird and words are hard and everything's a bit too much and Ranboo feels like he's gonna cry but only babies cry but he's not a baby he's, he's a big boy he can handle himself he's not gonna cry like a little kid.

He's crying anyways.

"Oh Boo," Tubbo coos, and something in Ranboo shatters at the affection.

It's the tone mixed with the nickname mixed with it coming from Tubbo who's safe and who he trusts.

His half hidden sniffles turn into full sobs and he gives up on his quest to be strong and be normal and be whatever he had been holding onto.

He makes grabby hands for Tubbo, and the other quickly grips him close, letting Ranboo's tears fall on his cheeks. Tommy joins the hug and for a few minutes the three of them stay like that.

It's only when Ranboo's tears naturally behind to come to an end that he realizes what he's doing, what's happening.

He's- he's acting-

He's acting like he shouldn't be. This isn't okay- what is he doing, he doesn't like this feeling and he's acting like a stupid little kid when he should be a big adult and deal with this stuff by himself.

He desperately wipes at his eyes and he tries to find some solid ground to stand on.

"Think 'm gonna go to my room," he stumbles through.

"You sure?" Tubbo says, "not gonna lie, I'm a little worried about you right now. Are you good to be alone?"

Ranboo wants to say yes but he really doesn't want to be alone and it feels like there's the two parts of him that can't make up their minds.

"Don't wanna be alone," he whines, "don't wanna be alone anymore. I'm always alone."

"Okay," Tubbo soothes, "you're okay."

"You can- POP- stay with us," Tommy pitches in, "you don't have to go to your room, or we can- POP- we can go with you."

Tears prick in his eyes again. They don't understand. They're not understanding!

"Don't wanna be alone," he insists again, and then, "but hafta. Hafta be alone."

"Why?" Tommy probes. His eyes flutter rapidly and he gulps a few times due to a tic.

"Cause you can't see me like this," Ranboo exasperatedly explains, "you can't."

"Why not?"

But that's too much for Ranboo, too much to think about that he finally gives up. He succumbs to tears once more and quits trying to leave for his room, instead crashing back into Tommy and Tubbo and burying himself between them.

"We've got you," Tubbo promises, and the side of Ranboo that is too tired to be embarrassed, too tired to be uncomfortable, feels loved like he never has before.

He lets himself be surrounded by their love, at least for this moment.

Chapter End Notes

ive been hinting at this subplot since ch1, a fair few of you have started to get it ;)

no work for a few months fuck yeah

still catching up on comments. next chap should be sooner as well.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[Encompass Sandbox Project](#): The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

[encompass: the sandbox](#): encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

[encompass: behind the scenes](#): an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

small minds

Chapter Summary

Ranboo, as he's prone to do, runs away. This doesn't really begin to solve anything, but does reveal quite a bit.

Chapter Notes

CW: fears, running away, bad decision making, near meltdown, overstimulation, memory issues/loss, confusion, panic driven behavior, unsafe behaviors, tics, discussion of suicide, mentions of physical abuse

No beta this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

That evening turns out to be the oddest one of Ranboo's life. And trust him, he's had a lot of odd nights of his father choking him out in his childhood room is anything to go by.

But this, this is weirder.

Ranboo cries for a good while, and Tommy and Tubbo comfort him. They hold him close, stroke his back, and whisper sweet words to him.

Eventually his tears slow, and then they stop.

After, Ranboo sits up and peers at his best friends, wondering what to do. He kind of wants to play a game like he did with Foolish. That had been really fun and got rid of all these bad feelings.

"Wanna get rid of the bad feelings," he eventually admits.

"Yeah?" Tommy says.

"What feelings?" Tubbo asks- "Sorry, what did you say, I missed it."

"The bad ones," Ranboo explains, "Wan' 'em gone."

"Okay," Tubbo agrees, "Then let's get rid of them."

They try a game first, but all of them are a bit too hard for him. Normally Ranboo loves games like Risk, or Monopoly, or with the switch. But everything's a bit too hard, a bit too fast paced and the frustration of it all quickly has him on the verge of tears again.

"Deep breaths," Tommy encourages, "We can find something else to do, it's okay."

Ranboo snuffles and nods weakly, grabbing Tommy's hand in one of his, and Tubbo's in the other. He needs them to anchor him.

"I've got you," he says, "makes it better."

"I'm glad Boo," Tubbo says, and Ranboo perks up significantly at the nickname.

"Want to go outside?" Tubbo asks, "maybe go for a walk?"

Immediately Ranboo shakes his head. He appreciates the attempt at giving him options of things to feel better, but outside is too scary right now. Even just being with Tommy and Tubbo like... like whatever this is, is hard enough.

"Okay," Tubbo says, "well, do you want to see if there's anything fun to do in your room?"

This time Ranboo freezes, but in a completely different way. Going outside made him nervous, apprehensive, but heading to his room terrifies him.

Desperately, he shakes his head.

"No?" Tubbo says.

Ranboo shakes his head more.

"No, no, no," he pleads, "No 'cause Daddy gonna hurt me."

"What do you mean?" Tommy says, "Like- is this, this is a- POGGERS, total poggers moment- flashback thing?"

Ranboo shakes his head cause that's not what it's like. Flashbacks feel real and reality is real but this is neither of those things. It's in his head but nothing feels real and that's scary.

"Means Daddy's gonna hurt me. He hurts me in my room when it's late so no one knows 'cause he doesn't want to make Mom more sick. Mom already hates me and I do things wrong and make everything worse so Mom tries to kill herself because I'm such a bad kid.

"And Daddy needs to make sure I know I'm a bad kid so he comes in at night and he hurts me. Sometimes he bends my arms and they hurt real bad and sometimes he hurts my ribs and sometimes he just shakes me or kicks me so I know I've been bad."

"Ranboo," Tubbo says, and he says it all drawn out with wide eyes and even though it's his name, Ranboo's pretty sure the fervent whisper wasn't for him.

His gaze glides over Tommy instead, who looks positively ill.

"Ranboo, I think you're having a flashback," Tommy says gently, "you're not in your childhood home. Your dad isn't around anymore. You're twenty and in college. Your dad can't get to you."

The worst part is Tommy doesn't tell him anything he doesn't know.

"I know," Ranboo pouts, "I know, I know I'm big an' I'm not there anymore an' I'm in school. I know all that and I'm not having a flashback. I know."

Ranboo's so sick of crying but those stupid tears begin to well in his eyes again.

"But I'm not big and I'm not in school and my dad's gonna hurt me if I go to my room and I'm so scared and I just wanna stay with you guys. Can I please, please stay with you guys? No room."

Tommy and Tubbo share a glance. Ranboo doesn't care enough to try and figure out their body language.

"Of course," Tommy eventually decides, "Of course we can do that bud."

"Yay!" Ranboo says, and he almost means it.

They spend the rest of the night doing their best to distract Ranboo from every bad thought he has, and no one mentions that whatever this trauma response is, none of them know what they're doing.

So they do their best, and hopefully that's good enough for the night.

When Ranboo wakes up the next morning, his memories feel weird.

Maybe that's stupid, the fact that memories have feelings, but Ranboo's always had a close understanding of his memory.

Or well, he doesn't. He understands his memory and he doesn't. He understands how he doesn't understand it. And maybe that's also stupid but it makes sense to him and it's a way to categorize something that he struggles with. His memory is not good and broken but he understands how it's broken. He at least has that.

Ranboo's memories all feel different. He can tell the difference between a memory that's true and a memory that isn't fully formed, that's missing pieces. He knows how to tell all of his mismatched shambles of a memory apart. He can identify them.

This is something he can't identify.

Because he remembers last night (at least as well as he ever can)- that part he's certain about. But even so it's like the memory has a film, like he's looking through a mirror and not quite in touch with it.

It's all there, just distorted in a way that's not quite his.

It's a memory that feels like trying to write his name with his left hand when he's always been right handed.

It's his, he knows it's his.

He remembers, he knows he remembers.

But then why does it feel weird?

The obvious explanation is whatever the heck happened last night. Tommy had suggested that it was a flashback, but it certainly didn't feel like one. Ranboo would know.

Er- Ranboo is pretty sure he would know.

Plus he has had been like that all day, even at Foolish's office.

Foolish!

Foolish was smart, and they were a professional. They'd probably know.

With that determination, Ranboo fumbles for his phone.

It's a bit awkward because he hasn't ever actually saved Foolish's number so he has to find where he wrote it down in his notes app and then call them from there. As the phone rings, he makes a mental note to save Foolish's number to a contact.

But the time Foolish has answered, he's forgotten that commitment.

And that's the thing, Foolish answers! Ranboo hadn't been sure considering every therapist he's had always did their best but were also overwhelmed with clients.

"I was hoping we could talk about yesterday," Ranboo says, when Foolish asks what he's calling about, "just- what happened. What happened to me? I- I dunno- I'm just..."

Ranboo trails off.

"Well," Foolish says, "it seemed like something to me, but I'd like for you to read a bit about it and then tell me what you think. Is that okay?"

Ranboo nods, then blushes because duh, Foolish can't see him- and then gives a verbal yes.

"Ranboo, have you heard of age regression before?"

Turns out whatever Foolish says next has Ranboo's brain booting itself into panic trauma mood and yeeting out the rest of the conversation. Fun.

The good news is that this complete memory deletion is something he's gotten familiar enough with to not feel too off put by it and instead ride the wave.

Foolish has sent him an email, so he assumes it's a recap.

And that it is, with articles and sources attached.

Ranboo combs through it and he reads and he devours and all of it fits so perfectly and god, god if he thought he was a freak well now he knows.

He reads it all and he understands that he thought he was a freak.

But now, now he gets it. He knows.

He knows for sure that he is a freak.

And he hates himself for it.

He slips out of the house before Tommy and Tubbo can question him about his behavior last night. He doesn't want to be cornered. He doesn't want to lie, but there's no way he can tell them the truth.

So he slips out in the hall of their building before sliding against the door as he wonders what he's going to do.

He doesn't know what to do, so he opens his memory book.

There's no real purpose to it except skimming through it. He likes to sometimes when he feels lost and confused and right now is definitely one of those times. He is feeling very much both lost and confused.

His fingers trail against one of the pages, over one of the entries he's written.

'Phil says your always welcome back home,' it reads, 'always.'

Well, Ranboo doesn't have any better ideas. So for the second time as of late, Ranboo finds himself running away to Phil's.

Part of him wishes he could run to Niki, but that still isn't an option.

Plus, Phil safer. Phil will think he's a freak with this new age regression thing but at least if Phil thinks he's a freak Ranboo can be prepared and learn to live without him.

But Niki is his sister, his guardian, and there is so much more on the line with her if she found out about the level of freak he's gotten to.

Which is why she can never find out.

Phil though- Phil can know he's a freak. It'll hurt less to lose him.

Unfortunately Phil isn't home.

Neither is Wilbur, nor is Fundy.

But Techno is.

"Techno?" Ranboo asks, completely lost as to why Techno would be here. He doesn't live here, and lives pretty dang far away. How and why is he here? Especially when no one else is.

"You're not supposed to be here," Techno says, as he lets Ranboo in.

Ranboo blinks.

"You aren't either," he replies, on instinct, because Techno isn't supposed to be here and the wrongness of it makes Ranboo's skin itch.

That's when he realizes how rude he sounds.

Sorry," he says, "I can leave."

"no," Techno insists, tapping his hand against his collar bone. "You can stay, j- it's- you're welcome here. But, you're not supposed to be here as in you aren't usually here and autism brain is doing it's whole thing."

Yup. That. Ranboo relates. That's exactly how he's feeling.

"Ah," he says, "gotcha. Same."

Techno nods. He flaps his hands loosely at his sides.

"I can leave," Ranboo repeats again.

Techno shoots him a look and there's obviously something behind it, some meaning Ranboo's supposed to be getting but he really really doesn't understand what Techno's saying.

"I would tell you if I wanted you to leave," Techno says briskly, and ushers Ranboo in. Well, he can't really refuse that.

"I didn't know you were visiting," Ranboo mentions.

"You either didn't check the group chat, or you forgot," Techno says, not unkindly. He's brisk and straightforward, but that's just Techno. Ranboo doesn't mind it.

"Probably both," Ranboo says with a light chuckle and a shrug.

"It can't be- oh that was rhetorical. Well yes, I'm visiting for a week."

"Hmm," Ranboo comments.

"Now, why are you here?"

"Uh..." Ranboo says, because he really doesn't want to talk about it or explain at all.

He can't even fully remember why he ran here in the first place.

He takes his backpack off to pull out his memory there, but his last entry is from the day before so he pulls out his phone to see if there's anything there.

On his phone the first thing he sees is his still opened email. The one from Foolish about age regression is still pulled up. Right, there's that.

"Uh," Ranboo says, because okay now he knows why he left but not why he came here.

Techno looks at him.

"Wilbur and Phil will both be back later," Techno says, "I have to pick up Fundy from daycare soon. If you want to talk to me, we can do that now or later. Wilbur and Phil will both have to wait for later unless it's an emergency. if it's anything else, let me know if it's something I can help with."

Ranboo blinks a few times.

"Have you always had a birthmark on your face?" Techno asks abruptly.

Ranboo squints, frowning, not sure what Techno's talking about. He doesn't have a birthmark on his face, why would Techno think that?

Techno taps near his mouth a few times and Ranboo touches his own face.

He quickly realizes Techno's talking about the white rash. He shrugs, because he really doesn't have the energy to get into it all that. He has his appointment soon enough. Hopefully that will get it all figured out.

The two of them stare at each other for another few long moments.

"Can I ask you about your parents?" Ranboo asks, quickly topic shifting once more with expert ease.

"Sure," Techno says, "but I might not answer."

Fair enough. Ranboo can respect that.

"Do you want to go to the living room?" Techno asks.

Ranboo nods, and they do so. Techno takes his usual seat off to the side of the couch and Ranboo takes his favorite armchair. It's the perfect squish and firmness and it's still the best chair he's ever sat in.

"You kept my peppers," Ranboo comments, momentarily distracted from his intended question as he's able to peek outside and catch sight of the garden.

Techno nods.

"Just because you weren't living here doesn't mean you didn't live here at one point. A part of you will always belong here."

Ranboo nods.

"Did you know before Phil adopted me I was actually removed from his care?" Techno mentions.

Ranboo shakes his head, because no he hadn't known that. He doesn't know the details of either Wilbur or Techno's adoptions.

Tommy's on the other hand, he's heard that stories a lot. But never his brothers.

"Yeah," Techno says. He begins to pick at his fingers, but pauses and seems to notice what he's doing, pulling a tangle out of his pocket instead, twisting it slowly and listening to the gentle clicking noises it occasionally makes.

"Basically," Techno begins, "Phil was supposed to be a temporary foster placement. When it was officially determined in court that my parents wouldn't have legal guardianship of me for the rest of my childhood, they wanted to send me to a long term foster home that was supposedly equipped to take kids like me that had been removed from homes for reasons outside of concerns of care but still had living parents. Basically- kids that were removed because they're parents did something illegal or got deported or something and not because they were abusive or neglectful. Does that make sense?"

Ranboo nods. He had sort of been in those homes, but he was in the other category Techno mentioned- abuse and neglect.

"Yeah, so they took me from Phil for a little bit."

"Me and Niki were removed from our home as well," Ranboo confesses, "It- I'm- it didn't happen immediately. But we were being neglected and our- our parents couldn't meet whatever the system said they needed to meet. So uh, we went into foster care. It was supposed to be temporary."

"It usually is," Techno agrees, "probably would have been for me too if my mom wasn't as involved in the shit that went down. It takes a lot to remove a kid from a home, and even more to keep them from that home."

"Did you- did you get visitation with your parents?" Ranboo asks.

Techno frowns, and he tightens the tangle around his fingers, creaking it on his joints.

"Nah," he says, "maybe if it had been something smaller. But people don't really take terrorism lightly, y'know?"

Ranboo does know. Or at least he kind of knows. Probably not like Techno though.

"Niki and I had visitation. I- uh- I guess I didn't want to see my parents usually."

Techno nods.

"That's a fair choice," he says, and for some reason that simple response is so validating. Ranboo feels a prickling on his skin as his entire body fills with warmth at the response. He hums slightly, and even begins rocking back and forth, that's how good technos words make him feel.

It's nice to be validated so simply, so easily. Techno doesn't know the full situation but he's validating Ranboo's experience and that's- it's incredible. It makes him feel so good, so much less gross.

Technos really nice to be around. He's the easiest of the Watson family for Ranboo to be around. It's probably the autism connection. It's, well Techno and him communicate in the same ways. They have brains that run at similar frequencies. Conversing and interacting with Techno is easy in a way that interacting with allistic people isn't.

Ranboo hadn't been expecting Techno when he showed up at Phil's, but he's glad he got him.

"How long are you staying around," Ranboo asks.

"'bout a week," Techno answers, "half visit, half helping out with Fundy because Wilbur and Phil both have hectic weeks."

Ranboo nods, and looks down at his feet. He doesn't really know how to progress this conversation any further so he just... doesn't.

It seems like Techno's at the same place, because they both sit in silence for a bit.

If they weren't both autistic, it would have been awkward. But it's not awkward because it's Techno and Ranboo enjoys silences like these and Techno gets them in a way that other people- even Tommy and Tubbo and Niki- don't.

There is no break to the silence, no start up conversation. Techno picks up a book from the coffee table and Ranboo pulls out his phone and neither of them continue talking, they just exist in the same space together.

Eventually a soft chiming alarm comes from Techno's phone and he places a bookmark in his book before setting it aside once more and standing.

"Do you want to come with me to pick up fundy? Unfortunately, we do have to go to the grocery near his day care today because it's Friday and he gets to pick out a snack."

Ranboo frowns.

"Grocery stores are thr unfortunate part, not that Fundy gets a snack. Right?"

"Right," Techno agrees.

To be completely honest, no, Ranboo doesn't really want to go. Grocery stores are often quite overwhelming.

"Okay," he says instead, "sure, why not."

So they go.

Fundy is ecstatic to see them, all soft whines and flappy hands as he struggles to breathe from the amount of excitement his tiny body is going through.

"Hi uncle Tech! Hi Ranboo! What are you doing here Ranboo? Uncle Tech I say hi to voices too! Voices being good or bad today?"

"The voices are okay today," Techno says, "and you don't have to say hi to them. They aren't real."

Fundy pouts.

"Well yeah," he says, "but you can hear them and they gotta know that um... the voices are valid and I care about you so I care about them," Fundy says.

Ranboo smiles at how sweet he is. Fundy doesn't seem to get the idea that the voices are auditory hallucinations and quite how that works, but he cares and that's sweet.

"Remember," Techno says, "it's like when we talked about dreaming. It's in my head."

"Uh huh, and your head is good and valid," Fundy says, "hi voices!"

Techno sighs, but doesn't protest further. Ranboos pretty sure he isn't upset, because he hasn't changed his posture at all, and still seems relaxed. Ranboos pretty sure he's just trying to explain to Fundy how hallucinations work.

Unfortunately, the entire concept might be a bit too much for a toddler to grasp.

"Ready for the grocery store?" Techno asks, and Fundy nods.

He rocks I'm his carseat, pressing against the straps to get that good pressure stim. He claps loudly as they drive to the store.

Ranboo wishes he was excited to see Fundy, but he's not.

Wait, that sounds really bad.

Ranboo takes a minute to get his thoughts and then rephrase them in his head.

He's excited to see Fundy but he's not having fun and he's not excited at this moment. Fundy's stimming in a lot of very noisy and very obvious ways and unfortunately it happens to be clashing with Ranboo's sensory sensitivities at the exact same time making Ranboo feel overwhelmed quickly.

And then they get to the store.

Ranboo's quickly blinded by the lights, blinking at the harsh fluorescents. There's so much noise, and it echoes, causing Ranboo to duck his head and cover his ears. Plus the bakery's

right by the entrance but so is the meat and there's so many smells and Ranboo can't- he can't do this.

He starts to get that creeping feeling, like the one from before when he began to act like a little kid. He doesn't want that to happen.

"Are you okay?" someone asks.

Ranboo flinches away, before realizing he recognizes the voice.

"Techno?" Ranboo says, "what are you doing here?"

Speaking of, where is 'here?' It's a grocery store, obviously, but not one Ranboo recognizes.

"You came to Phil's house," Techno explains, "and now we're picking up Fundy from daycare. After that, we brought Fundy to the grocery store to get a snack."

"Oh," Ranboo says, and sure enough Fundy is by his side as well.

"Do you want to go back to the car?" Techno suggests, "I can stay with Fundy."

"Uh... I don't remember where we parked," Ranboo says, because he only knew that they had even been in the car because Techno had implied so.

"That's okay," Techno says, "we can walk you back to the car and then Fundy and me can come back, or we can all go home, or you can stay with us."

"No!" Fundy shouts, and Ranboo winces from the volume. "No! I get a snack, I always get a snack!"

The kid's already almost near tears at the prospect of his routine being broken. Ranboo's in a similar state of near tears, albeit for completely different reasons.

"Hey Fundy, can we try taking a big deep breath?" Techno suggests, "Ranboo you can join us. And in... and out... there we go. Fundy I'm guessing you're feeling a lot right now and I want to help you and hear what you have to say. Alright? But I'm going to need a second, because first, I'm going to make sure Ranboo's okay, because I think he might be having a lot of big emotions too, and we do our best when we have those emotions, right?"

Fundy nods.

"Alright, then let's see if we can help Ranboo, and then we can figure out your snack. I know routine is really important to you and this is really hard right now. I don't want to change it, but I need to make sure Ranboo's safe and okay first."

Fundy gives another nod. He doesn't look happy at the situation, but he also doesn't seem to be mad or upset with Ranboo. That's good. Ranboo can deal with that.

"Okay," Fundy says, "we can do that. I can help Ranboo feel better too?"

"Maybe," Techno supports, "Let's ask him."

Fundy turns to Ranboo, grabbing his hand in his tiny ones.

"Um," he says, "how can we help you Ranboo?" he asks.

"I think I need to go back to the car," he admits. He doesn't want to because he doesn't want to mess with Fundy's routine but if he doesn't go back to the car Ranboo's going to have a meltdown in the middle of this grocery store.

Luckily, Fundy easily agrees and then gets super excited about helping Ranboo by showing him where they had parked.

Techno checks in with him and Ranboo confirms he's good. This allows Fundy and Techno to head back inside quickly and Fundy chooses his snack.

He picks out a bagel, and Ranboo's not sure what kind.

"What type of bagel did you get?" he asks Fundy, mumbling and still a little out of it.

"Um, plain!" he replies, "cause I've got texture sensitivities and stuff. Um, you told me you wrote mine down, so you always know if we're together."

"Yeah?"

"Mhmm," Fundy agrees, "in your people sections. I get my own section!"

Ranboo flips open his memory book, gliding to the back where he keeps notes on people he knows. Sure enough there's a few little notes about Fundy's texture sensitivities. He smiles at his own handwriting.

So Fundy gets his bagel and Ranboo doesn't have a meltdown and they go home.

Fundy immediately scrambles outside and races to his room before returning to the living room with some play things, dropping them on the floor.

"I'm glad you're here Ranboo," Fundy says, "you're the bestest player."

"I'm what?" Ranboo asks, completely baffled by what Fundy is saying.

"You play the best," Fundy states plainly, "you play like me. You play best. Play with me?"

And... well how can Ranboo say no to that?

Involuntarily and with no warning he feels something inside of him weaken, and then relax, and before he can protest otherwise he's got that cotton feeling in his head and he's whispering a small, "okay," to Fundy.

"kay," Fundy says, "Wanna play foxes with me?"

Ranboo nods eagerly. Foxes sounds like a really fun game to play. But, oh no! Ranboo doesn't know how to play that game.

"Um, how you play that game?" Ranboo asks.

He sees tyecho frown at his words, and Ranboo does his best to ignore it. He turns to Fundy instead, doing his best to just focus on him.

"I'm a fox and you're a fox and we play foxes. And Uncle Tech can be the Uncle fox."

"Sure," Techno agrees easily.

Wow! That does sound like a fun game. Ranboo would really like to play foxes.

"Um okay. I can be a fox!" Ranboo declares.

"Yay!" Fundy says, and then he makes a trilling noise and butts his head against Ranboo's chest.

"I'm saying a fox hello," he whispers.

Ranboo giggles at the action and gently butts his head against Fundy's shoulder, repeating the noise.

Fundy flaps his hands and Ranboo stims in response, doing some happy rocks.

Foxes is a fun game to play.

And if he focuses on foxes and on Fundy he can almost ignore Techno watching from the sidelines.

In fact, he's almost gotten to the point of ignoring Techno completely when out of nowhere Techno softly calls his name.

Ranboo does his best to straighten his posture, to somehow age up the shine that lays in eyes.

"Ye?" he says and he knows that it sounds so off, so young, but he doesn't know how this whole age regression thing works and honestly, he really really doesn't want to think about it. He barely avoids whimpering at the bad thoughts in his head.

"You feeling okay?" Techno asks.

Ranboo stills, stopping his toy wiggles and gentle rocks.

"Yeah," he promises, "I'm good."

"Are you sure?" Techno presses.

Ranboo doesn't like this. Techno's going to find out. He doesn't want to talk about this.

He looks back down at his feet and lets his toes wiggle. He watches the movement that they make and feels a little bit calmer.

He manages a nod, hoping that will satisfy Techno.

It doesn't.

"Are you dissociating?" Techno prompts gently. It's a reasonable question, a good question actually. But it's not one Ranboo wants to answer because the answer is no, Ranboo's just being stupid and being a little kid and Techno's going to find out and he'll hate him just like Tommy and Tubbo are going to hate him now.

Just like Ranboo hates himself.

He doesn't want anyone else to hate him.

Ranboo begins to cry.

"Hey it's okay!" Fundy encourages gently, "Um it's okay to cry. Technos jus' bein' silly cause he don'ts gots it. Crying is okay but Techno's not trying to be mean he don't gots it. Right uncle Techno?"

Techno gives a light frown.

"What don't I get?" he asks.

Fundy blinks, then points to himself, before point back at Ranboo.

"The same," he explains.

"What?"

Fundy rolls his eyes. Ranboo sinks on himself, but doesn't try to stop Fundy.

"Ranboo's like me," Fundy insists, "he just a kid! We play kid games and he plays then like a kid not like grown ups try play kid games.

"Ranboo's a kid right now. You're a grown up right now. You play like a grown up, me and Ranboo play like kids. We're fine, we just playing."

"Fundy-" Techno says gently, "that's not how being a kid works, Ranboo's an adult because..."

But Techno trails off, looking at Ranboo and his defensive posture, spotting something in his eyes, because he frowns again, and takes a moment.

"Ranboo?" Techno eventually says, "are you a kid right now?"

Ranboos' eyes go wide. He knew Techno would find out but he really wasn't ready for that. He doesn't know what to do, he doesn't know what to say!

Luckily, he's saved with the door opening.

"Daddy! Papa!" Fundy's squeaking immediately and racing to the door.

Ranboo's a creature of habit, and well it seems like running away is starting to turn into a little bit of a routine for him.

He takes the chance that he's given, grabs the bag at his side, and darts out the front door.

He runs, and keeps running.

Everything's so much and so scary and Ranboo's tired and he really doesn't want to be running but he can't be around the Watson's so he has to go long long far far away. Then he never has to see them again and they don't have to talk about all this stuff and that would be really really great

Ranboo doesn't want to talk about it.

Ranboos just wants things to go back to normal.

But nothing's normal anymore, and Ranboo hates every second of it. He wishes he never sprained his stupid worst, never began to learn about this trauma that had been buried so long. There was a reason his mind forgot it, and Ranboo wishes it had stayed that way.

He's crying before he even knows what's happening, aimlessly wandering through streets.

He walks, the pale street lights shining down on him as he continues to cry. There's minimal people milling the streets, going to and from restaurants, but besides them, Ranboo mostly has space. He avoids the larger roads with restaurants, choosing instead the streets that are not quite alleys.

In doing so, he ends up in front of a tattoo studio.

And then, Ranboo has a brilliant idea. Because he doesn't want to be this stupid little kid that's kid like and does kid things. He's an adult and he'll act like one.

Adults get tattoos.

So with all the confidence of someone who knows the earth is flat, he strolls into the tattoo studio.

Once he enters, his confidence immediately fades.

The person at the desk looks up at him, before looking back down at whatever they were focused on. Ranboo stumbles towards them and hesitates.

The person looks up again and Ranboo catches sight of their name tag.

The person's name is Hannah. But that's not the thing Ranboo notices. It's what's below Hannah's name. Hannah has their pronouns listed- she/they- right below their name.

Something about it makes Ranboo relax.

"Hi," Ranboo chokes out, "One tattoo please."

Hannah blinks at him, earrings dangling as she turns and studies him.

"One tattoo?" she says.

"Uh huh," Ranboo agrees, "One adult tattoo please."

"Kid, are you even eighteen?"

Ranboo bristles, of course he is! He's an adult and he can do adult things and he's definitely not at all small and little like and he's not a baby and he can do adult things.

"I'm an adult!" he protests, "And I wanna tattoo!"

She doesn't move.

"Okay, Adult. What kind of 'one Adult Tattoo' would you like?"

Ranboo's pretty sure she's mocking him. She's definitely mocking him. He bristles at the idea.

"I dunno," he hisses, "just give me a tattoo."

"Uh huh," she says, "okay, yeah, no, no one here is tattooing you. At least not tonight. Come up with an idea, think about it, do a consultation, set up an appointment. Then we can get you a tattoo."

But, but Ranboo needs one now!

He protests as much.

She frowns, and for the first time since they've been talking her face relaxes and her body unravels.

"Look," she says, "I- you're definitely not in an emotional place to get a tattoo. There's no way you can really consent to that right now. We're not tattooing you. But if you just need to sit down on a couch and cry, or someone to listen, we have a couch right over there. And I'm not a great people person, but Rose is more than willing to listen."

"Who's Rose?" Ranboo asks.

Hannah gestures over to the corner, ranboo follows her motion to a potted plant of some sort. But it's definitely not a rose. Ranboo points out as much.

Hannah shrugs.

Ranboo blinks, still a little stunned by this whole situation, and then goes to the couch, falling onto it.

"Feel free to squeeze a pillow," Hannah encourages, and Ranboo takes her up on the offer. He squeezes the plush right, rocking gently and looking out the window. At some points it's started raining.

Part of Ranboo does that thing again, now that the crisis of whatever was going on is over. He does that thing, that weird mental stuff, the strange coping mechanism and he begins to feel warm and cozy and soft and at home.

He doesn't know how long he stays.

And not in the way of how he was relaxing or oh time works weird and something was much faster or slower than you would expect.

In Ranboo's case, he's forgotten.

What he does remember is Techno at some point finding him, talking to and then tipping Hannah, and joining Ranboo on the couch.

"You got a tattoo?" Techno asks. His tone is flat, zero judgement.

"No," Ranboo hears himself say, "they wouldn't let me.

Techno hums and taps his head as he considers. Ranboo can only imagine what thoughts are running through him. He's gotta know that Ranboo's a freak now.

"You're allowed to be a kid," Techno says, "I- sometimes kids get their childhood taken away from them. It's okay- it's okay if you're trying to get that back."

Ranboo frowns, pulling his knees up to his chest.

"That's not what it is though," he admits, "it's- I don't feel like a kid, I... I am a kid. And... and I can't control it."

"You're an adult right now," Techno states, and Ranboo knows it's more of questioning confirmation that any sort of challenge or claim.

Ranboo thinks, and nods. He then tilts his head side to side a bit to indicate a 'kinda-sorta' response.

Techno nods in return.

"Okay," he says, "well, when you are- when you do get like that-"

"I don't want to talk about it," Ranboo interrupts.

"Okay," Techno says, "that's okay too."

They're still sitting on the couches in the tattoo studio. Ranboo's so grateful of the random front desk person and her restraint in not kicking him out.

"Let's go home," Techno suggests. Ranboo considers, and then accepts, deciding that is something he can handle.

Ranboo requests they go back to his actual home, because as much as he loves the Watson household, he really wants to be somewhere familiar, somewhere safe, and his bedroom is the place that gives him those feelings the most.

"Hey, you have a dog, right?" Ranboo asks.

"Yes," Techno agrees, "Floof. He's an ESA."

"Have you- well why did you get an ESA?"

Techno hums, and rubs his hands together.

"Good for grounding, stimming, gave me stability and comfort- to name a few things," Techno admits, "He's also a nice distraction or someone to vent too when my hallucinations get bad."

"Hmmm," Ranboo hums. Something that's been a little bit of an idea continues in the back of his head.

"Are you ready to go home?" Techno asks, "Wil's waiting for us. Or did you need another minute."

"Wil?" Ranboo asks. Techno nods.

"Oh, um..."

Well he doesn't feel like a kid anymore which is a huge perk, plus he can actually think and breathe again, so he nods. Techno and him leave the tattoo studio together. Ranboo spares a wave behind him for Rose, and another to Hannah. Rose gives no response- unsurprising considering she's a plant- but Hannah gives a small nod of acknowledgement.

And out into the night they go.

When they get back into the car- with Wilbur driving- Techno turns to face him.

"Where do you want to go?" he asks, "Phil's? Your place? Somewhere else?"

"My place," Ranboo responds, because he's scared that if he's around Fundy again he'll just start acting like a kid once more.

"Okay," Wilbur agrees, and sets a course for his apartment, "We can make that happen."

A lot of you figured it, yes Ranboo age regresses. Really glad to show age regression in the fic in a space that isn't dedicated to age regression but shows age regression in an every day setting. I hope y'all like that aspect.

I'm posting this on mobile with my phone at 3% right after signing a lease. The things I do for y'all /aff

I'm catching up on comments right when I get home too :D

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[Encompass Sandbox Project](#): The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

[encompass: the sandbox](#): encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

[encompass: behind the scenes](#): an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

a want or a need

Chapter Summary

Ranboo had a little bit of a breakdown. Now he's got to pick up those pieces. Thankfully he has the Watson's, Tubbo, and Niki on his side.

Chapter Notes

CW: suicidal ideation, running away, intense distress, discussion of child abuse, discussion of invalidation, discussion of victim-blaming, self-harm, tics, trauma and related symptoms, dissociation, memory loss, memory issues

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's not a long car ride, but it begins in silence. Knowing them, that doesn't hold for long.

Wilbur stays silent at the beginning, peering at him in the review mirror.

Ranboo's pretty sure Techno's trying to stay silent, because he keeps tapping on the steering wheel before opening his mouth and then closing it again.

It ends up being Techno to breach the silence.

"Are-" Techno says, "I-"

"Hey Ranboo," Wilbur says, ignoring the 'shut up' Techno hisses at himself under his breath.

"Yeah?" Ranboo asks.

"Um," Wilbur says, "sorry I don't actually have something to say I was just worried Techno was going to say something impulsively and it would come out wrong and make an awkward silence so instead I was impulsive and said something but I didn't actually know what I was going to say so now here we are."

"That's ableist," Techno says, deadpan. But it's Techno, so Ranboo knows it's a joke.

Wilbur rolls his eyes.

"Transphobic," he shoots right back, even though that remark makes even less sense in context. "Learn some social skills and I'll stop interrupting."

"Ableist," Techno protests again.

Ranboo almost snorts. Wilbur's impromptu speech is a reminder of Wilbur's own anxiety, as if Ranboo could ever forget that about him.

"Do you um- is that-" Techno takes a breath and restarts, "What happened earlier, is that why you came to Phil's?"

Ranboo thinks, and then nods.

Techno catches it in the mirror and his lips tighten. Ranboo ducks his head. He has no idea what Techno's thinking, and that's terrifying.

"Were you running to something, or running away from something?" Wilbur eventually asks.

"What?" Ranboo asks, not quite clear on the distinction Wilbur is apparently outlining. He ran. Isn't that, well isn't that all the same?

"Were you running to something, or running away from something," Wilbur repeats, "in the way- um. Like what was your intention behind running? Did you need to get away from a place, person, or thing? Or did you need to get near Phil's house for a person, place, or thing?"

"Of course you'd be a fucking expert on running," Techno mutters as he turns his blinker on, merging into the next lane over.

"That I do," Wilbur says, "I was a pretty expert runner."

"Bullshit," Techno says, "An expert wouldn't be caught."

Ranboo almost chuckles, the first hint of a smile starting to reappear on his face.

"Plus, Ranboo's gotten further than you, hasn't he?" Techno asks.

"I mean I went over five miles once," Wilbur argues.

"Try thirty," Ranboo brags, even though it's something he's really not proud of.

"Damn," Wilbur remarks, "Was that the one to Niki?"

Oh. Right. Niki.

"Yeah," Ranboo remarks, looking down at his wrists. He has the urge to scratch them, but that's probably counter productive to his continued recovery process of not self harming or attempting suicide again.

"You were running to something," Wilbur says, "running to Niki. You had something to run for. I'm not surprised you got there."

Ranboo sits with that for a moment, remembering how desperate he had been at that time.

He really would have done anything. Part of that scares him, another part feels powerful.

"What about you?" Ranboo asks, "What were you running to?"

"Nothing," Wilbur responds, certain and confident, his voice unwavering as if his answer has been practiced and repeated a thousand times. And maybe it has. Ranboo wouldn't know.

"I was doing the opposite," Wilbur shares, "I was always running away. Sometimes from people, sometimes places, but mostly myself."

Himself? That doesn't- he doesn't mean that literally right? No of course not, that's physically impossible.

But then what does Wilbur mean?

"What do you mean, running from yourself?"

Wilbur hums, turning to face Ranboo properly. His smile is lazy, gentle, unforced. It makes Ranboo a little less scared, a little more relaxed. Wilbur's so easy to trust.

"I was a young teen struggling with a lot," Wilbur shares, "A lot of my struggles were internal, and I didn't have the coping skills and support systems to deal with it. So I did my best to avoid those issues, get rid of them. I even tried running from them."

Ranboo feels cold, and a bit distant. He's never lived in the snow before, but suddenly he has the image of his small, tiny, fragile child hand pushing against a window coated with frost.

"Dad," he begs, "please, please let me back in. It's so cold out here."

His dad's face is on the other side- the side inside the house and not stuck outside in freezing temperatures.

He makes no indication of hearing Ranboo, even though ranboo is certain he can. All he does is stare out the window, eyes fixed on Ranboo. Ranboo doesn't know if he even moves to blink.

Ranboo on the other hand, does move. He blinks and shakes and does his best to stop his teeth from chattering.

He can feel his exposed skin already starting to sting, partly from the cold and partly from the water.

He wonders how quickly he would die out here. He never finds out.

His mom lets him back in, with a blank look and unfocused gaze before disappearing to god knows where.

"I'm running away," Ranboo admits and he squeezes his eyes tight as that sinking feeling he's recognized as this age regression thing starts to creep up on him. He does his best to push it aside to know avail.

"I'm runnin' way," Ranboo repeats. "I'm running away and I don't wanna keep running away, I don't want to run away anymore. I just wanna be warm and safe and at home and not- I don't wanna have to deal with the cold. I don't want to run away anymore I just wanna have a home and love and none of the bad. None of the cobwebs and none of the cracks and none of the hurt and I don't- I don't- I don't wanna do this anymore," Ranboo confesses. "I don't- I can't do this anymore."

The car goes startlingly quiet, fat tears rolling down Ranboo's face as he struggles to breathe.

"That sounds a lot like suicide ideation," Wilbur says, "that's-"

"No!" Ranboo protests, "no! No can't- no I'm not wanting suicide. I can't- Mommy is like that and Daddy doesn't like it and I make it all worse and can't- no can't do that."

"I'm pulling over," Techno announces. Ranboo barely recognizes the car's change in motion.

"Your Mommy and Daddy aren't here," Techno says, voice as light and gentle as Ranboo has ever heard it. "It's okay to be yourself, however you are. You aren't bad or wrong. Your Mommy and Daddy aren't here anymore."

Ranboo cries, sniffing as he rubs at his eyes, the stinging of tears enveloping his face slowly but surely.

"I know," he cries, "I know. I know. They not here anymore but I still feel like they are and I'm scared and I don't want to be scared anymore. I'm so tired of being scared. I'm so tired of being tired."

"That sounds really tricky," Wilbur validates, "that's a lot of hard emotions to deal with. Is there any type of support you want? Do you want to talk about it? Do you just want to vent."

"I don't know," Ranboo says, "I don't know what I want."

Ranboo just wants to be little and not have to think about any of this, but he doesn't know if he's allowed to say that.

"Okay," Wilbur says, "I have a question and it might be a little hard but it's really important I get an answer, okay?"

Ranboo nods hesitantly. He's wary, worried of what Wilbur will propose to him. But Ranboo trusts Wilbur and that doesn't change even when he's in this vulnerable headspace.

"You talked about suicide ideation," Wilbur reminds, "and you have a history of self-harming unintentionally. What are you going to do differently this time that'll keep you safe?"

Ranboo blinks, not fully comprehending Wilbur's question. Why would he hurt himself?

"Not hurt myself," Ranboo promises, "Don't do that."

"Okay," Wilbur says, "but what's going to be different this time?"

Ranboo thinks, even though that's not exactly the easiest to do right now. In this altered state his mind is all a bit rattled, shaken up. He can certainly still think but everything seems so much slower and simpler.

"I'm not- not adult Ranboo this time," he admits, "I'm just little."

He still doesn't like this whole age regression thing. It's confusing and weird. He doesn't like it.

But Foolish had called it a coping mechanism and so far everyone has been supportive and- and regressing might even keep him safe.

Might.

He's incredibly confident for someone who really doesn't know that.

Wilbur points out that fact and as best as he can, Ranboo explains his perspective.

As he does, Techno finally pulls back out into the road and they continue driving.

It's just a few minutes more to Ranboo's apartment, and by the time they arrive, the three of them have worked out a plan, and idea what will give Ranboo trust but also safety

Wilbur and Techno are going to stay the night. One of them will always be up, just in case. They won't be glued to his side, but they will be there. Ranboo also has to send a text to Foolish asking if they can have an emergency session or call as soon as possible.

Sometime during that whole process Ranboo ages up, shooting back to closer to his teen years then that of a child. But as Wilbur offers his hand to walk with him to the front door of his apartment, ranboo finds himself sliding back down rapidly.

This time, he thinks he might be okay with it.

If it keeps him safe- well if it keeps him safe then that's something.

At this point it's been one hell of a day, so Ranboo heads off to sleep leaving Techno and Wilbur with Tommy and Tubbo, telling them- with permission- what's going on.

The next day, Ranboo has his emergency call with Foolish. Unfortunately, it's kind of useless.

Or not useless, as it does help in the moment, everyone tells him that it did, that Ranboo had seemed calmer and more relaxed and everything got less extreme, less dire, in a much quicker speed than what might have been the case.

The thing is, Ranboo had to be told all that, completely having forgotten the call himself.

Tommy says that he said they talked about age regression, so in a few more days Ranboo repeats that conversation with Foolish in his actual therapy session and they talk about the reality of what age regression is.

It's not sexual, which hadn't even been one of Ranboo's concerns because- well why would his brain even go there? But it is good to know. It's a trauma response and a way to cope.

It also keeps Ranboo safe. It's still a working theory but younger, regressed Ranboo seems to have much more fears but also a much better understanding of his body and brain and is unwilling to hurt it.

Maybe it's because regressed Ranboo is already dissociated in his own way, but dissociating doesn't have him self harming like it does non regressed Ranboo.

Which is... interesting.

Tommy and Tubbo take it in stride which is nice and not at all surprising but still a relief. That first week, he regresses a lot and then for the past few days he hasn't. He still doesn't really know how it works but it- well Ranboo was looking for something to help with everything he was going through and...

And maybe this is it.

It's still nice to be an adult though, Ranboo definitely prefers it. Being regressed, being small, has its own perks, its own comfort, its own safety, but it's not fully him- who Ranboo truly is.

So being an adult is nice.

Adult responsibilities... less so.

He's no longer in crisis.

He's no longer in crisis which means he needs to nip this fear in the bud before it festers and talk to Niki.

He picks up his phone, clicks on his contact and selects Niki's name as quickly as possible.

The phone rings.

Once. Twice. Three times.

Niki picks up.

"Hello."

Ranboo hangs up.

He doesn't mean to, it's just- well he panics and he does want to hear from Niki and talk this out, really he does it just ignites something in him that's so scared, so scared of rejection of confrontation that he avoids it at all cost.

Niki calls him back.

His phone vibrates in his hand, her caller id up on his phone.

Cautiously, bravely, he answers.

"Ranboo," Niki breathes out the moment he answers.

"Niki," Ranboo responds, "hi."

And so they begin.

It's not an easy conversation to have, that's for sure, but it's one they need to do. They need to move forward.

Because the thing about time is it keeps moving forward, it keeps going.

Maybe they can't run with time, maybe they can't even walk. But Ranboo is determined to keep stumbling forward at whatever pace he can manage and get there in his own time.

If he has to stumble, even crawl, so be it. He can't just stay still. Because then time will pass him, leaving him with nothing.

"Niki," Ranboo says when he finally finds his words, "the things you said to me- that wasn't- those things weren't okay."

"You're completely right," Niki says, "and I am so, so, truly sorry."

Ranboo pauses, blinks.

"You're being genuine, right?" Ranboo asks.

Her voice oozes genuinity, as thick as honey and Ranboo's first instinct is to believe it. But turns out neurotypicals like to mess with tones and sometimes exaggerate tones to be sarcastic. The problem is that Ranboo never knows when a tone is genuine and when it's exaggerated.

"Yes," Niki promises, "I'm being genuine."

"Oh, okay," Ranboo says.

That certainly makes things a lot easier.

Or actually, it doesn't. Like- in the long run this probably makes things easier, Niki being apologetic and all. It certainly will help their relationship.

It's just- well Ranboo has always had the habit of scripting difficult conversations and so he had planned what he was going to say, how he was going to explain and now...

Now he doesn't need to.

The sudden switch in routine and loss of a script has him tapping anxiously on his collarbone.

"Did you want to talk first?" Niki says, which is when Ranboo realizes how silent he has been and for how long. "Or do you want me to talk first?"

"Uh..." Ranboo was going to talk first, but now he doesn't know what to say! "I guess you."

"Alright," she says. Ranboo can hear her deep inhale from his side of the call. "First off, uh, content warnings I guess. I'm going to be talking about abuse, our parents, my perspective- which might seem invalidating to your experiences but it's not meant to be so, more just a look of what I went through- and overall trauma themes. Is that okay?"

"Yeah," Ranboo says.

"I know you weren't abused," Niki starts off, "but I think you were. And- and I know how that sounds but I'm hoping you'll let me explain."

Niki pauses, maybe for Ranboo to put his two cents in, but he lets her carry on.

"I remember our childhood clearly. Uhm- a lot of that, those pre teen years were hard for me. I- um. Mom was really sick and you were just a baby and Dad was so busy with Mom that I- I practically raised you Ranboo. I did raise you. I-

"Ranboo, your first word was 'Mom'. But- but it wasn't towards our mom. It was to me. You called me, Mom.

"And I think- I don't think Dad ever understood that. He was harsh on you. That and with Mom being sick and rough times and-

"I remember our childhood clearly and I practically raised you and I never saw any signs of Dad abusing you. But that didn't mean it didn't happen. I could have- I probably missed it. And if you're this certain that you were abused, if you have this evidence then, yes, yes I see where you're coming from and I'm ready to support and believe you.

"And I'm sorry I wasn't ready before. Because- well, really I was- I wasn't ready to face that reality myself. Because if you were abused, it meant that I missed it. And as your sister, as- as the person who was your mom... Well that means I failed to protect you. I failed you. And I wasn't, I'm not ready to live with that."

"You didn't fail me," Ranboo says. That's his first reaction to the load of information Niki has just dumped on him, and it's not wrong.

Niki didn't fail him, she never had.

"I'm trying to accept that," Niki agrees, "because you're right. Failure is a strong word. But I could have done better. And I'm trying to- I'm trying to reframe that, and come at that and acknowledge that from a healthier growth perspective instead of a negative belief about myself."

"Did you go back to therapy?" Ranboo asks.

Niki laughs.

"Yeah," she says, "Yeah I did. That obvious?"

"Just a little," Ranboo teases. He takes a moment to reflect. "Did I really call you Mom?"

"Up until your fourth birthday," Niki confirms.

Oh. Ranboo hadn't known that. That...

Niki really had raised him, hadn't she? From infancy, to his protector in foster care to taking him in the moment she could.

Ranboo wonders if there had ever been a time Niki wasn't focused on caring for him. She had been so young too, younger than Ranboo is now.

What does that do to a person? That heavy responsibility at such a young age?

It wasn't a fair burden for Niki to hold. Yet, she did it anyway.

Ranboo will never forget that. Even so, he needs her to know she no longer needs to carry that for him.

"You're the best mom I've ever had," Ranboo confesses, "but I think I prefer you as my sister."

Niki laughs, choked tears behind it.

"Thanks," she says.

"I forgive you," Ranboo whispers. "Thank you- thank you for... thank you for doing better."

"Always," she says, "I will always promise to do my best."

It's a natural conclusion, a problem resolved, but maybe not solved. After all, you can't solve trauma, solve relationships. They're not things to solve. All you can do is learn and grow. Maybe that's better than solving.

Even still, this natural conclusion seems to have a bit left to it, like a book that draws to an end but has those filler pages of unmarked white.

"What's on your mind?" Ranboo prods, because he knows Niki, and he knows she has something more to say.

"I- and I don't mean this in a bad way, I love you Ranboo, so so so much-"

"I know," Ranboo says, "It's okay. Just say what you're going to say."

It is okay too, for her to share, Ranboo can handle it. That doesn't mean Ranboo isn't holding his breath in anticipation.

"I never signed up to be your mother," Niki says, "I never wanted to be your mother. And I think that's why the system didn't want to get custody of you."

The first part makes sense. It wasn't fair for Ranboos' parents to force Niki into that role. Niki was his caretaker, his sister, but she should never have been his mother.

That relationship may work for other family systems, but it didn't fit Niki. It never had. It wasn't a fault of her, just plain truth.

That part makes sense. It isn't confusing. What comes after, that's much more up to debate.

"I had to talk to a psychiatrist," Niki confesses, "one of many evals, y'know? Before I took you in. And they asked- well they asked if I wanted to do this, or if it was something I felt obligated to do and I-"

Niki cuts herself off with a shaky breath and Ranboo knows that she's near tears.

It's pretty obvious what her next words will be, but instead of pain Ranboo just wants to reach across and comfort her. Unfortunately, technology hasn't quite achieved that yet.

"I didn't know what to say," Niki admits, "because caring for you- caring for you had never been a choice, but a, a necessity for your care and-

"You said yes," Ranboo realizes, "you did feel obligated."

"No," Niki said, "no. I didn't. I told them that I felt no obligation, that I cared for you because I wanted to. But I did hesitate. I hesitated," Niki takes a watery breath before continuing.

"Because, yes, yes Ranboo I would choose you a thousand times over. Taking care of you, helping raise you has been an honor and a pleasure. But that was the first time it has been presented to me as a choice. And I had never seen it that way."

"You hesitated," Ranboo repeats.

"Yeah," Niki says, "I did. And you didn't come home with me."

It's not fair to blame that one thing. Ranboo knows it and he's sure Niki does too. There were so many factors playing into whether Niki could take him in or not and that certainly wasn't the end all be all.

But it may have been the tipping point.

Ranboo could be angry, could be upset.

But all he can think about is Niki, barely an adult herself, being told that for the first time in her life she had a choice to take care of her baby brother.

And that same young girl hesitating but still saying yes because there was nothing more important to her than her brother.

Niki had chosen Ranboo every step of the way, putting him first constantly and consistently. Ranboo's not surprised that she was the one that got the name of 'Mom' when he was a young child. She certainly raised him more than either of their parents ever did.

Ranboo doesn't really have the words to say he understands, that it's okay, so he stumbles through validation and then does his best to shift the tone so it's not sitting in this weird liminal space.

Alright. Ranboo can deal with this. He can handle this. The best part is that this time he's pretty sure he's telling the truth.

"Any more earth shattering revelations?" Ranboo jokes.

Niki hesitates.

Wait what? Niki hesitates? Why did Niki hesitate? What more is there to all of this?

"Actually," she says, and Ranboo goes back to tapping his foot against the floor and the tips of his fingers gently across his collarbone. He does his best to make zero noise across the line, letting Niki speak.

"Well... um. Mom and Dad- they were- y'know how I said it was sort of weird how they left?"

"Yeah," ranboo acknowledges.

"Yeah," Niki says, "that um, that's true. It's just... well we had. Visitation had ended."

Oh. Why- why had that happened? What had caused visitation to end? And why was it so important Ranboo knew this if he wasn't involved with visitation in the first place?

"And it had ended," Niki continues, "because our parents were deemed fit to take us back."

"Then why-"

"But they only want to take back me," Niki interrupts, "they told our case manager they wanted me, and wanted to leave you in foster care."

"You," Ranboo breathes out, and he's not sure where he was going with this.

"They got me for two months," Niki admits, "but I- I wasn't happy and I did my best to be a brat because how could they leave you? And I told my case worker that I wanted to leave and that if I stayed I'd hurt myself and eventually Mom starting getting bad again and-

"And Dad called our case worker, had him pick me up, and then they left. I haven't seen them since."

"They wanted you," Ranboo realizes.

They wanted Niki. They didn't want him.

"No," Niki argues, "they wanted a doll- an ideal of a child. They didn't want you, but they also didn't want me. They didn't want the reality of having children."

There's logic behind what Niki says. It's fair, it's accurate, and goes to show how the mindset their parents held were the issues.

But they had wanted to keep Niki and they had wanted to get rid of him.

He's not mad at Niki, none of this was her fault, but god does it hurt.

Eventually, they both hang up having to do a lot of emotional processing but finally on good terms again.

There's a lot to process after all, even if Niki and him might be good now. Mostly, Ranboo needs to adjust to the news Niki gave him. Niki was also kind enough to think about recording the call, so she sent the audio file over to Ranboo if he forgot about the call or its details. Which is likely considering how rough it had been at times.

Niki had been wanted. Ranboo hadn't been wanted.

He wonders what it would have been like to be wanted.

It's a dark thought, something that sits in him and makes his feet cold and his hands clammy. He stands up and goes to his door, opening it slowly and peeking out. Tubbo and Tommy are in the living room, chatting and laughing and as Ranboo watches them he feels...

... Better isn't the right word.

Ranboo doesn't feel better. If anything he feels more sad.

He also feels wanted.

He feels warm and thinks, he thinks maybe that's all he needs for now.

Maybe being wanted it's enough.

Chapter End Notes

moved into my new place total poggers moment. (cat loves the new window)

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[Encompass Sandbox Project](#): The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

[encompass: the sandbox](#): encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

identify me

Chapter Summary

Ranboo continues to learn about and understand his age regression. He also learns a few more things about himself and figures out where he's at on his recovery path.

Chapter Notes

CW: tics, trauma, child abuse (discussed), broken bones (past), self harm, fears of rejection, medical appointment, memory issues/loss, dissociation

Additional CW: discussion of pet death in end notes

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo had thought that he was out of crisis mode. The fresh trails of blood on his arms when he wakes up one morning say otherwise.

Oops.

At least they're bandaged.

His first question to himself is if this happened when he was regressed. Because of it did, it breaks the pattern of regressed him not hurting himself

Ranboo's really hoping that pattern hasn't been broken, because so far it's the only coping mechanism to ensure he doesn't self-harm.

He begins looking for people who might be able to give him answers, because his memory book says nothing when he checks it. Which is unusual but not totally out of place. Surprise surprise, the guy with memory issues is known for forgetting to writing things in his memory book.

He leaves his bedroom for the living room, only to find both of his roommates missing. Okay, Ranboo will just try their rooms.

Knocking on Tommy's door gets no answer, so he moves to Tubbo's.

He knocks gently, gets no response which is fairly typical for Tubbo. Knocking- unless you're really going at it- isn't in his hearing range. Instead, Ranboo cracks open the door to reach through and switch Tubbo's light on and then off.

"Yeah?" Tubbo calls, "you can come in."

Satisfied, Ranboo pushes the door fully open and takes a step in.

"Oh hey," Tubbo asks, "what's up?"

"What happened last night?" Ranboo asks, getting straight to the point.

Tubbo leans back in his chair, relaxed with his foot twisting in the floor.

"If you didn't have memory issues I'd make a joke about college students and partying irresponsibly."

Ranboo raises his eyebrow.

Tubbo sighs, mockingly in what Ranboo thinks is supposed to be teasing and not mean. And oh hey, there's Tubbo's smile. Yeah it's definitely not meant to be mean, but funny. Ranboo smiles along with the teasing.

When he knows things are jokes, he usually likes them. It sometimes just takes a minute to realize they are jokes.

"But since you do have memory issues," Tubbo drawls, "I guess I'll tell you." He pauses, studies Ranboo's face and then adds, "I'm teasing by the way."

"I could actually tell this time," Ranboo notes, because that's not very common for him.

Tubbo immediately laughs at his comment and Ranboo blushes realizing in hindsight how scathing his comment was.

"Nice," Tubbo says, ignoring Ranboo's protests that he was being genuine.

"Alright, yeah, last night," Tubbo carries on, "I'm assuming you're talking about your new arm accessories?"

"Yup," Ranboo confirms, and hey Tubbo seems to know about it and he's still a bit joking so that probably means it's not too bad, right?

"It was really weird," Tubbo admits.

Oh. Well that makes Ranboo feel a bit less positive. Not that he really went into this entire 'hey I self harmed again' conversation with a ton of positivity.

"You self harmed," Tubbo says, "in the bathroom. But then well- me and Tommy weren't in the bathroom with you so we don't know exactly but you age regressed and came out. And you explained to us that you had hurt yourself while big and that had made you small and asked us to help clean up."

Ranboo's stomach drops for numerous reasons.

Firstly, it hurts everytime he learns he hurts himself again. He doesn't want to, and he hates that there's this part of him that does it unconsciously. Hates that it's something he still does.

Second, hearing his regressed self in relation to self harm is terrifying. If Foolish's education and Ranboo's own research is anything to go by, Ranboo's pretty much exposing his child self to self harm. Which is... well Ranboo doesn't like the idea of exposing a child to that.

Third, he hates hearing that Tubbo was involved. He knows Tubbo doesn't mind, they've talked about boundaries with Ranboo's self harm before. Ranboo also knows that if Tubbo did mind, he would tell them, as they had already pre-agreed too.

Finally, and most important of all, his stomach drops from relief.

He's so relieved.

Because this instance of self harm really does outline and begin to show how this new coping mechanism is helping Ranboo.

Ranboo dissociated and hurt himself and instead of continuing to hurt himself and potentially attempt suicide, a part of his brain went into protection mode and he regressed.

That age regressed version of himself doesn't self harm, and even though he had most likely still been dissociating, he had been able to stop self harming.

That's a huge win.

Maybe, maybe he really is out of crisis mode.

He will likely continue to dissociate and self harm, but in this instance he had a safety net to catch him before it got too bad.

Now if Ranboo can work on that- on gaining more tools and coping mechanisms to extend and build his safety net... well maybe Ranboo really is on the path to healing.

Healing.

Healing.

Why does- Ranboo thinks-

For some reason the word healing is triggering something in his memory, something he's pretty sure is completely unrelated to all of this other stuff he was focusing on.

"Healing," Ranboo remarks out loud.

"What," Tubbo asks.

"Do you know what I would possibly need to remember around the word 'healing?'" Ranboo asks, hoping that maybe someone else has answers for his shitty memory.

"That's a little broad," Tubbo understates, "anything more to go off of?"

Ranboo frowns and shakes his head. He really has no idea where the healing part-memory came from.

"Check your memory book," Tubbo suggests, "it might be in there, and if not you can at least rule out stuff."

Ranboo nods to that, and retreats back into his own room, flipping through his memory book. He starts with the recent pages, slowly tracing back in time.

It takes him a few minutes, but then suddenly he located it. Ranboo realizes with a jolt that he completely forgot to give Phil an update on his x-ray scans.

Immediately, he types out a text and sends it to Phil. Then, he makes a new note in his memory book on the most recent page to remind himself to keep on top of that and that he sent Phil a message.

He reads through other notes in his memory book and, oh hey, he has that appointment today about the rash on his face and hands.

Wait, today?!

Ranboo desperately checks the time, realizes his appointment isn't for another few hours, and takes a deep sigh of relief.

He really doesn't want to be late to this appointment. Appointments always make him feel stressed.

He's not sure if it's the situation itself or Ranboo's anxiety just being silly or maybe his need for routine. Either way, appointments always tend to make him anxious, scared that he won't show up on time.

So with some fumbling and mental rearranging of his schedule, Ranboo confirms he's not going to be late.

He leaves a little over an hour later, having plenty of buffer time. Phil texts him as he's getting ready and Ranboo texts him back as he's on the bus to the office he has his appointment at.

Phil says he's here to talk about anything he wants to about his x-ray scans.

Ranboo vents a little, gives Phil the low down, but honestly he's not really ready to go into depth about it. Foolish and him still haven't really discussed it in depth.

Ranboo's mostly okay with that. He'd like to get to it, like to continue addressing the abuse he faced as a child, but in all honesty he doesn't feel sturdy enough and stable enough to do that work yet.

Luckily, Foolish gets that and supports that, which is why they're working on other things like identity and coping skills and understanding his age regression before jumping into trauma processing. After all, Ranboo can't safely process trauma if he doesn't have the skills to process yet.

His last therapist really was a shitshow, wasn't she? How was she even licensed?

Ranboo's so preoccupied with those thoughts that he almost misses his stop. But he doesn't, getting off at the right time and heading in to check in for his appointment.

That whole process is hazy and Ranboo's not really surprised. He's had enough medical bullcrap to last him a lifetime.

Most of the appointment goes similar, unfortunately with him hazy and not all there. It makes it hard to communicate and understand what's going on with him. Ranboo does his best to take notes but that's also hard to do when he's dissociating.

He tries to use coping skills to ground himself, but nothing's working. He even stops masking his stims, but that doesn't help either.

All he is is hazy and missing a very important doctor's conversation.

It seems like in time at all he's being ushered out of the office.

Hopefully his notes are enough.

His notes are not enough.

That's his biggest conclusion once he feels a bit more grounded.

There's a few scattered sentences with shaky writing and weird medical terms most certainly spelled directly.

The last sentence seems the most important so Ranboo does a quick Google search and...

Oh.

Oh, it's not a rash.

Huh. Vitiligo is- well he's seen pictures of it before it's just... well Ranboo had never really thought about it, never really knew about it.

Guess he's even whiter than before. A lack of melanin will do that to you.

It also makes explaining his not-actually-rash a lot easier.

Tubbo and Tommy don't push, don't even ask but Ranboo is more than happy to share.

"White boy's even more white," Ranboo announces.

"POGGERS," Tommy tics. And then, "wait what?"

Ranboo shows them his Google search and they all hem and haw over the diagnosis.

Ranboo's not really sure how to feel about it. If it gets as extreme as some of the photos- well Ranboo's never really liked attention. Luckily, his skin is so light already that the affected areas aren't even that visible.

It's not like vitiligo is a bad thing actually, Ranboo actually kind of likes how it looks, but his anxiety is bad enough without more people staring at him.

A lot of the pictures on Google aren't even of white people because the contrast isn't the same.

It's not bad, Ranboo guesses, but something he'd rather do without probably.

"This is so cool," Tubbo says, "your melon-mites have been completely destroyed!"

Go figure Tubbo would find that interesting

What, what, what did Tubbo say?

"Ranboo's melon mites?" Tommy asks with a chuckle and Tubbo points to a line on the screen.

"Mela- melanocytes," Tommy gently corrects.

"Melon mites sounds better."

"Says the deaf guy," Tommy teases. Tubbo sticks his tongue out.

Ranboo's supposed to believe that he's the one with a coping mechanism that causes him to mentally age regress when he's dealing with their childish behavior?

Tommy rolls his eyes, then looks back to Ranboo.

"You really are some medical anomaly, aren't you," Tommy observes. "First being allergic to water, and now this."

"Aww," Tubbo coos, "our little medical anomaly."

Tommy snorts.

"Wow," Ranboo drawls, "thanks, I feel so loved." And he really, really does feel loved, even if he is teasing.

"You're a quirked up white boy," Tommy announces. Which wow, thanks Tommy that makes him feel great.

"It's like art," Tubbo observes, "your lack of melon mites."

Ranboo hums, and looks down at his hands, at the trailing white that's spreading more and more. He makes a promise to check other commonly affected areas later, to see where he has

the patches of depigmentation.

"Yeah," he observes, "I guess it is."

It could do with some contrast though. Color would look nice with the bright white.

He sits and talks with Tubbo and Tommy some more, but makes note of his idea in his memory book with a promise to revisit it.

And revisit it he does, quite quickly actually.

It's- well Hannah did seem pretty cool. And she had offered when he wasn't half regressed like he was that first time when he had stumbled into her studio.

He calls Techno because he barely knows who Hannah is and he needs some level of advice.

"What do you think about me getting a tattoo?"

"Yes," Techno says.

Ranboo laughs, and begins to figure it out.

He doesn't want to be impulsive about it but also- also it seems to fit him, to be a part of him. He loves the idea of having art on his body, having a visual reminder of something that's important to him for when his memory fails him.

He describes his idea, his first start to art on his body, and Hannah jumps on the idea..

Hannah sits down with him and she's only a little amused by how all of this has all turned out.

"I recently found out I have a skin condition," Ranboo admits, "and parts of my skin won't have melanin. And I'm adjusting to like- accepting my body with that. And I was also- I was abused as a kid. I grew up- well I've never really felt like my body has been my own. And I thought getting tattoos would help reclaim that for me"

Hannah nods, listening all the while.

"That would be awesome," she agrees, "beautiful."

Ranboo blushes at the praise. Something about how she says it...

Ranboo's never been called beautiful before. Maybe handsome, but never beautiful. And even handsome is a rarity.

"Thanks," he mumbles.

"For what?" she laughs.

Ranboo shrugs.

"The beautiful thing," he mutters.

Hannah laughs again, "yeah, have you seen yourself? Gorgeous."

Ranboo blushes more.

"Thanks," he repeats, "sorry I dunno it just makes me feel all..." he trails off, making some sort of vague gesture towards his heart and other insides.

"Ah, I get you," she says, "a bit of that gender euphoria feeling? That's how I feel about tattoos."

"Wait, wait what? Gender euphoria? What-"

Hannah's face goes pale.

"Oh," she says, "oh, damn I'm sorry. I definitely- I'm so sorry I thought you were nonbinary. I- are you cis?"

"Uh... yes?" Ranboo asks. Or states. He states it, yeah that's what he does. Why would he ask?

"You don't really sound sure," she observes.

Ranboo blinks.

"I mean I guess, I've never really- I mean- well I would- you just-" Ranboo fumbles for words, failing to find anything that fits.

Hannah just watches him.

"I mean doesn't everyone question their gender at least like... a little bit?"

Hannah laughs. She's doing that a lot. At least it feels light hearted, not mean. Ranboo doesn't mind it. He actually loves the sound of it and how it echoes in the room.

"No," she says, "I mean- questioning your gender identity doesn't automatically make you trans or nonbinary but... I mean it's a little..." She trails off, making a hand motion sort of like a wave except instead of side to side her hand starts up and then falls down with a smooth, limp dip.

Ranboo copies the motion and Hannah cackles.

"Yeah, it's just a little queer."

Queer.

Queer.

That's a nice word.

"Queer," Ranboo echoes, "queer, queer, queer."

Hannah smiles as he echoes, letting him stim with the sound and feel of it in his mouth.

"How do I know if I'm nonbinary?" Ranboo then asks.

Hannah shrugs, "I mean do you feel like a boy?"

It's Ranboo's turn to laugh.

"No, of course not."

Hannah blinks at him.

*What?" Ranboo asks.

"Dude, that's like, literally the definition of nonbinary."

"What? Wait, wait," Ranboo tries to compartmentalize, "wait but I thought- isn't the whole thing- isn't being cis never questioning your gender? Never really feeling anything about it?"

"First part kinda-ish, second part absolutely not," Hannah laughs, "now I don't mean to put any labels on you, that's up to you, but that sounds very nonbinary of you."

Nonbinary. Queer.

The option to use he/they pronouns.

"I don't think I really care that much," Ranboo says. It's awkward having those words come out of his mouth, it feels almost disrespectful, but he's doing his best with the words he has. "And- well does nonbinary- nonbinary feels more like not caring then male. Um. Yeah."

"Nice," Hannah says.

"'They' pronouns aren't that bad either," Ranboo throws out, "um, 'he' and 'they'. I mean, they kind of go together well, yeah?"

"Yeah," Hannah says, "yeah they do."

"But uh, well they sound really good. Y'know?"

"Yeah," Hannah agrees, smiling from the corner of her mouth. Ranboo can just barely see the hint of her teeth in her smile. "Yeah. I know."

Hannah gets it, Hannah knows.

Ranboo thinks maybe he- maybe they do too.

Ranboo knows. Ranboo knows they're nonbinary. And that sounds pretty okay to them.

With a sense of relief, of somehow being lighter, Ranboo sits with his new he/they pronouns as a she/they tattoo artist gives him a small rainbow infinity symbol on his wrist. It's perfect, all of it.

But then it's over and they're told how to take care of their new skin art and Ranboo has to make some choices.

The first person they tell about their changing pronouns is Phil.

He tells Phil a lot of things first, but it makes sense to him. Phil is someone Ranboo trusts unconditionally, but also someone he could survive losing.

If he told Tommy, Tubbo, or Niki any of these things and they rejected him- Ranboo has no clue what he would do. So Phil ends up being his consistent test subject.

This time, it's at a cafe because Ranboo doesn't want to risk anyone he knows overhearing.

So they invite Phil out- Phil chooses a location- and Ranboo trusts google maps to get them there. To be fair- they've never had that good of a sense of direction. Which once again, is apparently a common autistic trait.

Ranboo doesn't remember what Phil orders, the words going so fast and being so fluent that the name slips from his mind instantly. Ranboo gets a hot chocolate because he's not really supposed to have caffeine and hot chocolate is always the same- it's safer than tea that can be too bitter or have something new.

The hot chocolate's good and as they sip at it, they almost forget why they invited Phil out in the first place. But even their memory isn't as awful as to forget their new gender identity and pronouns, so with a shaky voice and knees that jump and rattle, they slowly spill the words out.

He talks about never really feeling like a guy and learning about being nonbinary and that fitting and then the idea of pronouns and how he/him feels fine, but never had felt like him and they/them's also right there and it feels so wonderful when they use 'he' and 'they' together.

"So what do you think?" Ranboo asks, picking at the skin by his nails.

"I'm really happy for you," Phil says, "I'm so glad you figured that out."

Ranboo smiles and ducks his head. He really needs to stop feeling so nervous about these sorts of things, of course his family is going to support him.

"And- if you do want to talk about it more, I'm always here for you. But if you want someone with a bit more knowledge, a bit more hands on experience, I definitely suggest talking to Wilbur. Because what you said about not feeling completely connected to male? That's a lot like how Wilbur feels."

Oh. Yeah that makes sense. Ranboo should have thought about the out queer member of the family when he started exploring gender, shouldn't they have?

But on the other hand it's kind of cool that they could go to Phil, that Ranboo had the privilege of going to Phil, and had been comfortable enough to at least try and share this part of him with Phil. Some kids don't even get the chance, the opportunity, to consider sharing what Ranboo shared, especially to cis parental figures. And sure, Ranboo had been nervous he would be rejected but he had still felt more comfortable going to Phil than the resident queer family member and maybe that means something.

It doesn't mean Ranboo won't be talking to Wilbur though. That sounds like a very good idea.

He pulls out his memory book and makes a note to do exactly that.

"Yeah, that sounds good, thanks Phil."

Phil smiles easily, in that way he always does, always has. Ranboo's used to forgetting but that's one thing he'll always remember, how easy it is for Phil to smile and how genuine it is every time.

"Of course mate," Phil promises, "you can come to me about anything."

Ranboo pauses, considering those words. He's almost certain Phil has said that to them before and so far it's always been true. Phil has always been there for them, always done their best by them.

There has never been a moment that Phil let Ranboo down, not really.

Maybe Ranboo had blamed Phil for letting him down- like when he took him back from Niki's- but that had never been Phil's fault and he moved forward to advocate for Ranboo and help raise their voice. Time and time again Phil had proved he could be trusted, that he would always be there for Ranboo even if Ranboo never wanted or needed him again.

Ranboo can trust Phil, they don't need to keep being wary of him.

"Alright," Ranboo says, "Thanks."

Phil nods, sipping at his coffee.

"There actually were a few more things I was hoping to talk to you about," Ranboo admits.

"Go for it," Phil encourages, and that's all the permission Ranboo needs.

They start by explaining their therapy progress and then going into this new form of dissociation. From there, Ranboo carefully breaches the topic of age regression. Phil listens thoughtfully and nods, never challenging Ranboo's experience. He's attentive, and caring, and Ranboo sighs in relief.

Ranboo continues, and now that the big things are out of the way, they continue just explaining what's been up with their life lately, and about the next tattoo they plan on getting. When Ranboo explains the concept to Phil, his eyes light up and he says it sounds like a fantastic idea. The praise warms Ranboo, and they keep talking.

And then they get on to a topic they haven't fully thought about themselves.

"I've also been vaguely considering the idea of a service dog," they admit, "I haven't really gone far down that path, but well, it's really hard being the level of independent I'd like to be with the mental health issues I'm facing. I'm getting safer with my dissociation through age regression, and I hope that continues, but I still worry about my safety and I know others do to and also like- with my autism and memory issues I really think a service dog could help."

And still Phil nods. Seriously, could anything surprise this man?

"That definitely sounds like something that might help you," Phil validates, "Have you found any sources or anyone more knowledgeable in the area to maybe help start you out in exploring that?"

"No," Ranboo admits, "But I think I'm going to bring it up with my therapist."

"That sounds smart," Phil agrees.

"Yeah," Ranboo nods, and then pauses, he taps his foot a little and drums his finger on the table.

"What do you think of the idea?" he asks, "Do you- I mean- like I thought- just-" Ranboo doesn't know where he's going with what he's saying so he shrugs and stops.

"Well," Phil starts, "I don't really know anything about service animals so I'm not sure I can really hold an opinion on that side of things. But I do remember when Techno got FLoof and my biggest question for him was if he could responsibly care for Floof. Do you think you could do that for a dog?"

Ranboo instantly wants to reply with a resounding 'yes.' But he pauses, because in reality he's not quite sure.

"Uh," he admits, as he considers.

Dogs have to be walked a lot and Ranboo does struggle to get out of the house and regularly exercise. They need to be fed and Ranboo has the money for that but then Ranboo still needs to buy the food- which means going to a pet store or figuring out how to order it online. And he'd need to pick up the poop which doesn't sound fun but doable, except maybe it'll be overwhelming sensory wise- which is always a concern- and Ranboo lives in an apartment so he'd have to talk his dog out a lot but he has memory issues so he might not remember and dogs take time and energy and space and money and Ranboo isn't sure he has all those things available to give.

Is Ranboo able and ready to take care of a dog?

"You don't have to figure it out right away," Phil promises. He must notice some form of panicked expression on Ranboo's face, because he's instantly soothing and calm and he's knit his eyebrows together in that way Ranboo knows means he's concerned. "It's just something to think about," Phil soothes.

Something to think about.

Ranboo can do that.

In fact, they think about it their whole way home. The idea absolutely consumes their thoughts and the moment they run into Tubbo and Tommy back at their place they're starting a new line of questioning.

"What-" Ranboos stumbles, "I- you guys like dogs, right?"

Both Tubbo and Tommy give nods of agreement.

"Um," Ranboo says, "um. What if I got a service dog?"

They share twin glances.

"I don't think it would be yet, or be soon," Ranboo amends, "I don't know if I can take care of a dog yet. But one day. Soonish."

Tubbo and Tommy both give enthusiastic agreement and that begins to settle it. Naturally, they bring it up to Foolish next.

"I love the idea," Foolish agrees.

Ranboo blinks.

"But?" Ranboo asks, because there's no way Foolish is finished.

Foolish shrugs.

"No 'but,'" they say, "I think it's a great goal to work towards."

Ranboo's body slumps. Foolish watches their posture change, and raises an eyebrow. Ranboo shakes their foot.

"Work towards," Ranboo notes, "meaning not right now."

"No," Foolish says, "not right now. Taking care of a pet is a huge responsibility and I think we're both aware you're not in a place to take care of a service dog at this point in time. But, the process for a service dog can take a lengthy amount of time and it can be expensive, so I think it's a great idea to start down that path and we can work on the skills to be a responsible pet owner."

Part of Ranboo's a little sad and they wonder when they got so set on this idea, and that it would be happening quickly anyways.

It's not the news they want to hear. But it makes sense.

Ranboo sighs, and nods.

"Okay," they say, "where do we begin?"

Chapter End Notes

i literally just got the news that we had to put down my family dog as i was posting this so im,,, kinda feeling a lot rn. it was pretty sudden. nonetheless, i hope y'all enjoy the chapter.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

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[encompass: the sandbox](#): encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

[encompass: behind the scenes](#): an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

better with you

Chapter Summary

Ranboo heals and rests, and heals some more.

Chapter Notes

CW: trauma, suicide ideation, dissociation, memory loss/issues, intense fear, intense anxiety, tics, past abuse

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Turns out getting a service dog is not an easy task. Which is... well frustrating to say the least

In Ranboo's case, it kind of works out though. Because Ranboo doesn't feel ready to take care of a dog. He's not at that point yet. But he at least feels like he's making progress getting started on this process.

And they have the support of everyone around them.

They've always had the support of everyone around them.

It's then that Ranboo realizes how he so often believes that the people he trusts will betray him.

It makes sense that he holds that belief. He had been so young and his parents had not only abandoned him but abused him, taught him that he was unwanted.

Learning that you aren't wanted, that you're a mistake, that nothing you do will ever make you worth anything is a lot to unlearn. It doesn't go away in a day.

But maybe a start is realizing that they aren't around those people now, that they are around people who would never do that to them. They are safe.

They are safe and they are loved and they are supported and they are wanted.

He's not going to lose that.

"I'm nonbinary," Ranboo admits to a quite room, "I'm going to start using he/they pronouns."

"That's great," Tubbo says, "I'm happy for you."

"Pog," Tommy says, and then, "POGGERS," with a tic.

The responses are immediate, without pause, as natural as breathing.

In turn, Ranboo lets out their own held breath.

"Thanks," they say. The support they receive doesn't waver for a moment.

Suddenly they want to cry and begin to feel so, so small.

This time, Ranboo lets it happen and what was once the mind of a young adult is now that of a child.

"Thanks," he cries, this time a bit more watery, "thanks. That was scary."

"Aww," Tommy coos, instantly noticing the shift, "hey bud. Yeah, I bet- bet you killed a woman, killed a woman feeling good- I bet it was scary."

Tubbo nods his agreement.

"It's allowed to be scary," Tubbo acknowledges, "but you're safe here and we're both really really proud of you for feeling safe enough to share that."

Ranboo hums, and then nods.

"Yeah," they decide, "cause you guys safe. And always safe and I don' needa worry 'bout you not bein' safe 'cause you are."

"That's absolutely right," Tubbo agrees, "yes. Yes."

Tommy says nothing this time, and when Ranboo looks over at him, his eyes are filled with tears.

"Tommy?" Ranboo asks, "um- um are you okay? I'm sorry, I can- I'm sorry I didn't mean to!"

Ranboo still doesn't know what he did to cause Tommy's tears but Tommy wasn't crying before and then Ranboo spoke and now Tommy is crying so it's obviously his fault!

Oh no, Ranboo had been trying so hard to be vulnerable and show that things are good here but then he- then he ruined it!

He always ruins things.

"No," Tommy chokes out, "no, no Ranboo it's- POGGERS THAT'S POGGERS- not you. It's- fu- frick man- quirked up white boy. White boy with a little bit of swag- I'm just, like-"

Tommy makes a grumbling noise and clenches and unclenches his hands.

The action looks a little scary but Ranboo's still mostly sure that Tommy's safe, so it's probably okay, right?

"I'm so glad," Tommy finally manages, "that you feel safe enough around us to share that- THAT'S POGGERS. And I'm so glad that you realize that we are safe people and we love you no matter what and that- THAT'S POGGERS- you're able to share hard things with us and..." Tommy takes a deep breathe and those hints of tears continue to stay in the corner of his eyes, "and I get it," he continues. I get how scary it can be and how hard and fu-frick I just- I understand and I hear you and I see you and I love you so so much."

Tommy pauses, and then does his best to look over at Ranboo. It's mostly successful, even as Tommy's head jerks and bobs with tics. They hold that intense gaze for a touch too long when Tommy finally asks his final question.

"Does that make sense?" Tommy asks.

"Yeah," Ranboo answers, because it does. It does make sense. "I love you too."

Telling everyone else he's using he/they pronouns and identifying as nonbinary ends up being a lot easier after that. A good portion of it is thanks to Ranboo's realization that the people he's surrounding himself with are safe.

Foolish takes this observation and applies it to their session immediately, and now Ranboo's new therapy homework is to be vulnerable with those he cares about, because that's something that's a challenge for him, but that he can do.

He starts with speaking to Wilbur.

He comes out to Wilbur, and explains that if Wilbur's okay with it, he'd like to chat about gender stuff a bit.

Wilbur nods and says he'd love to, and Ranboo gets to talking.

They begin by describing their own experience, of the fact that they don't think they've ever felt like a boy, it was just a label given to them and-

And the label of being male didn't feel wrong in the way that it made Ranboo feel bad or gross, it just felt wrong in the way of, 'huh that's not quite right. Something is mixed up here.'

Ranboo talks about how they thought that was just how every cis person felt and they didn't know there was a difference between feeling apathy to gender and identifying as cis.

"I get that," Wilbur validates, "gender is confusing and weird. Honestly if I wasn't afab, I'm not sure I would identify as trans masc."

"You consider yourself afab?" Ranboo asks.

"Yeah, I do," Wilbur explains, "because I was assigned female at birth. That wasn't exactly correct even sex wise, because y'know, obviously intersex, but it was the sex identifier given to me. So I do identify with the concept of being afab. I was raised as if I was female, both sex and gender wise."

Ranboo nods, and then realizes that he never got Wilbur's full explanation before they interrupted him with questions.

"What do you mean you wouldn't identify as trans masc?" Ranboo asks.

"Well," Wilbur heistates, "I think- I think I identify as trans masc so strongly because it was reclaiming the side of me that I could have been labeled with had I been identified as intersex at birth. I think I feel so strongly about my trans masc identity because I was raised afab. I think I would feel more apathy to masculine identities- as well as feminine identities- if I had a stronger connection with my intersexness at a younger age. Identity wise, I think I'd consider myself nonbinary, but not necessarily trans. But in this world where I was raised as afab, I consider myself a trans man, and as male, even though I stray on that nonbinary line. Does that make any sense?"

"Mostly," Ranboo says, "but also kind of not. Gender's weird."

Wilbur laughs at that.

"Yeah he agrees, yeah it is."

"I don't think- I don't think I get gender like most people do," Ranboo admits, "like- not even how nonbinary people do. Does that make sense?"

"It does," Wilbur validates immediately, "your experience with gender is valid. It's also a pretty common experience for autistic trans and nonbinary people in particular."

The consistent and quick validation and reassurance Wilbur gives him has Ranboo feeling warm and safe. He smiles softly.

Things are much less scary when he has people he can trust around him. Things are much less scary when he recognizes he has people he can trust around him.

It makes him feel almost giddy, strangely powerful, and like a weight has been taken off his shoulders.

"Why do you think that is?" Tubbo asks when Ranboo mentions the feeling to him.

"I dunno?" Ranboo says. They don't make eye contact, but then again they usually don't. Instead with one of their fingers they trail around the patches of depigmentation from their vitiligo, stimming with their own body. A hum sits in their throat and they reflect.

They feel so safe here being there authentic, queer, autistic, disabled self and don't feel like they have to hide any pieces of themselves at all.

Oh. Maybe that's what he's feeling that way.

"I feel safe," Ranboo admits, and tears spring to his eyes at just the admittance, "I feel safe. I finally- I finally feel safe and like I have people to rely on and I don't got to do it all myself."

He's slipping fast, and he recognizes that. But he doesn't want to regress because he wants to have this conversation with Tubbo.

"Yeah," Tubbo says, "I bet that's a really good feeling."

"It is," Ranboo emphasizes. They find themselves aging up again as they put words to their emotions and feelings.

"I mean I know we talked about it some," Ranboo admits, "but it's something I'm still getting used to, y'know?"

"Course boss man," Tubbo agrees easily, "This shit doesn't fix itself in a day."

Which is true, but it's... it's more than that. Ranboo feels like his whole life has been a dream, like this murky underwater world, and now, now they're finally awake.

With a jerk they remember a memory from their childhood.

"Y'know as a kid," they mention, "I used to think I was a bear hibernating?"

Tubbo laughs.

"Did I- a bear hibernating?" Tubbo asks in confirmation.

Ranboo nods, and Tubbo waves his hand in some sort of request for clarification.

Ranboo shifts in their seat, resettling and trying to get comfortable to explain themselves. They feel hazy a bit, but not in the regressed way, in the dissociated way.

Even so, they want to continue. They feel like this is important.

"Yeah," they continue, "I thought I was a bear hibernating."

And they explain how reality had always been confusing for them, just out of grasp and they wondered and were puzzled by life and concept and the nature of existence. They discussed how they would stare into space and make up entire stories in their head instead of playing with toys and how being a bear made more sense than being a human.

Because Ranboo couldn't prove they were a person. And child Ranboo hadn't known about philosophy and the eternal question of existence. All they knew is that they couldn't prove they were human, they couldn't prove they were alive, and they couldn't prove this wasn't a dream or simulation.

But bears, bears on the other hand, hibernated. And they were bears, so they didn't question their existence. So if Ranboo couldn't prove they were a real person, it made much more sense they were a bear.

And sure, maybe they couldn't prove they were a bear either, but bears didn't need to prove that they were bears. And anyways, they didn't have to worry about that all right now because if they were a bear they were in a human form right now which meant they were dreaming

except it had been a really long time so certainly they were hibernating. Because bears did that, y'know.

At the time, being a hibernating bear made much more sense to Ranboo than his current life of pain and abuse.

Being a bear having a bad dream was easier for him to grasp than being a human who was neglected and abused just for existing.

"That's- that's like... really sad," Tubbo says.

"Yeah," Ranboo agrees, a bit dissociated, "yeah I guess it is in a way."

There's a heavy silence for a moment.

"Well I'm glad you're a person," Tubbo says, "because if you were a bear you might eat me."

"True, true."

Ranboo can't really manage much more words, in that weird space of haziness that dissociation brings them to. Tubbo seems to get that, not pushing any further, and just existing with them in that moment.

Maybe being a living person was okay after all.

Maybe they didn't need to question their existence as a living person.

Basically they've conquered their suicide ideation over the fact that as a child they had been convinced that they were a bear.

"Okay time out," Foolish says, making a time out t-shape with their hands, "let me make sure I'm following. You've stopped actively idealizing suicide because you figured out you're not a bear."

"I mean kinda," Ranboo admits.

Foolish blinks.

"Hey I mean, if it works, it works," Foolish accepts, "but explain it to me again, I gotta understand this better."

Ranboo shrugs, and dives into his explanation.

He explains to Foolish the same thing that he explained to Tubbo, about how a strange combination of questioning reality and having a traumatic childhood had convinced him he was a bear hibernating, that this was all just a dream.

Being a bear was a coping mechanism, a layer protecting him from the abuse he faced.

He doesn't think he's a bear now, and maybe he never really truly thought he was a bear, or felt like a bear, but wished.

Being a bear would be better than a human.

That's the closest Ranboo's childhood brain could get to 'not existing as myself is better than existing as myself,' and as Ranboo grew, that evolved into 'not existing is better than existing,' which quickly grew into 'dying is better than living-' ergo suicide ideation.

But Ranboo doesn't want or wish to be a bear anymore. He just wants to be himself.

He wants to live.

Foolish nods, and listens, and doesn't challenge Ranboo's existence. Instead, he validates Ranboo's feelings, talks about what this new development means, and discusses how they can move forward together.

'Cause that's what Ranboo's got to, just keep stumbling forward.

It's starting to feel less like a chore. It's still hard, it's still difficult- a challenge, but it's not a chore.

A chore is something unpleasant that he has to do, but doesn't want to.

A challenge is something hard that he wants to participate in, he consents to participate in.

Life isn't a chore anymore, but now a challenge. It's a relief in its own way.

"I think I'm ready to start tackling some of those trauma memories I have," Ranboo decides, "I want to start processing my childhood. I think- I think I'm ready. It's going to be hard, and unpleasant, but I've learned tools to keep myself safe and I value myself in a new light and I think- I think this is something I need to do. It's time."

Foolish nods.

"Okay," they say, "yeah. Okay."

"Yeah?" Ranboo asks, voice tinged with a hopefulness he's not used to hearing from himself.

"Yeah," Foolish agrees, "let's talk about beginning to do that."

Ranboo smiles, and it begins.

They won't begin to unpack his trauma this session, and not every session will be dedicated to processing past trauma. They sketch a layout for how it will look, and how to know when it's productive and when it's harmful. But that'll come later. For now, Ranboo's okay with beginning the journey.

He updates Niki on the news, because now that they're finally talking again, Ranboo can't help calling her practically everyday. It's not always to talk about therapy- in fact it usually isn't to talk about therapy. He doesn't just vent to Niki, that's not healthy.

He's just happy to talk to her again.

She seems to agree, because she proposes he stay over during a weekend coming up.

Ranboo quickly agrees, and before long the short trip is set in motion.

Niki doesn't live far, so it's not a big ordeal, but even small things can seem like a lot to Ranboo so he makes a list of things to pack and gets all set up.

He even does something he's proud of- he tells Niki about his age regression. He doesn't- he doesn't think she'll be mean about it. But it is new and it is a bit different and it is a bit scary but Niki won't hurt him, Ranboo knows that, so he shares it anyways.

It makes Niki cry.

And not because she thinks it's gross or weird or doesn't make sense.

Niki cries because she grieves the kid Ranboo never got to be.

Ranboo thinks that's fair enough. He lets her grieve. It is a lot.

He doesn't know if he'll regress around Niki. He's still learning his triggers and what tips him into regression. Most of them are pretty negative triggers to do with his trauma, and he has no idea how that will show up around Niki.

Because Niki is obviously a huge positive in his life, someone who he loves deeply and finds darling. But Niki is also the only tangible thing he has from his past. And things to do with his past bring up bad memories and bad memories make him regress.

So she needs to know. Ranboo feels the need to tell her, for her to be prepared in case he does regress so he can get the support he needs and she isn't caught unaware.

"I have plenty of experience with child you," Niki promises, "just because you're physically older doesn't change the fact that I love you, all of you."

Fair enough.

Even so, the unconditional love has Ranboo blushing. He really did get the best sister in the world.

He arrives at Niki's place early Saturday and they spend the day goofing off and having fun together and making dinner just the two of them and Ranboo loves every part of it.

What he doesn't love is waking up Sunday morning with no memory of the night before, staring up at an unfamiliar ceiling and not knowing where he is.

His body stiffens in the unfamiliar atmosphere, and his eyes dart around, hoping to make some sense of surroundings.

He's in a bed, but he doesn't remember who's or what bed this is. The soft, light rose-colored sheets are familiar but he doesn't know why.

But then he looks to his side and sees Niki sprawled out, hair splayed across her pillow, still softly asleep.

Ranboo smiles at her figure, instantly feeling safe even if he doesn't really know what's going on. He relaxes, sinking back into the bed, yawning loudly. He makes a humming noise in the back of his throat, playing with the noise, gently stimming with the sound it makes.

They do that for a few minutes, truly allowing themselves to relax for a moment. They're still a bit confused, but they're with Niki so it's okay.

They're not in a situation where they need to figure out everything all away, so they don't bother getting up yet to fetch their memory book.

As they lay there, some pieces start to make sense, while others still stay a mystery. With a lack of desperation and panic, Ranboo's able to remember that he was sleeping over at Niki's, that they were going to spend some time together. He remembers catching the bus to Niki's, but that's where things start to get blurry. They don't really remember the bus ride, but they do remember getting off. They don't remember meeting Niki, but they do remember knocking on her door.

He thinks he had a good time though.

He does wonder a bit why Niki and him are in the same bed.

Eventually, Niki begins to stir, eyes fluttering open as her breath stutters with waking. She blinks a few times, twitching, before stirring more fully and turning to her other side to face Ranboo.

"Morning," she mumbles, still half asleep.

"Morning," Ranboo smiles, feeling absolutely at home. And then, "I spent the night with you?" they ask.

Niki nods and she swipes at her eyes.

"Yeah," she confirms, "you don't remember?"

Ranboo shakes his head.

Niki yawns.

"Yeah. You ended up regressing in the evening. We decided to share a bed."

"Oh."

“Do you usually forget things when you regress?” Niki asks, “If you're comfortable sharing of course.”

“No yeah, it’s okay,” Ranboo says. He does blush lightly because there is still a part of him that feels shame because of his age regression, but he’s working on that. “I don’t- I do and I don’t forget,” he tries to explain. He pauses, hums, and tries to figure out how to describe the different experiences of memory loss and gaps he faces.

“I don’t forget things when I regress,” Ranboo explains, “but the memories are harder to reach. Um- it’s kind of like honey. They’re- if the average person’s memory is as easy to access as it is easy to swipe a hand through water, for me it’s like trying to swim through honey. They’re there, but they’re covered in a thick, sticky film and harder to reach and understand.”

Niki blinks. Ranboo continues.

“But- but forgetting things- my normal memory is like swiss cheese. There’s- there’s parts missing and sometimes those holes are big, sometimes they’re tiny. The tiny ones are easier to navigate around, and sometimes I don’t even notice them, but the big ones can be a lot more to adapt to and figure out because- because there’s like this big piece missing where there should be something. Does- does that make sense?”

Niki hesitates.

“I think so,” she eventually says, “Yes. Thank you for being vulnerable.”

Ranboo blushes.

“Course,” he mutters, “But uh- yeah. So I don’t necessarily forget things when I regress. But uh- I did this time. I um- I kinda remember coming over, but the- the time I was here is pretty much just all- um- yeah- gone pretty much. Swiss cheese this time. Not honey.”

"Ah," Niki says, because she's almost as used to this as Ranboo is, "got you. What do you need from me?"

"Hmm," Ranboo hums, "what did we do last night?"

So Niki tells him and gosh Ranboo apparently even forgot coming out to her his memory really fucked him over this time. Or maybe it's for the better that he doesn't remember what would have had to be anxiety leading up to the interaction.

It is what it is.

They also painted their nails. Niki's had done his purple, and Ranboo had chosen a soft mint for hers. He lets himself hold his sister's hand, looking at their nails together, and feels like things are getting better.

Even when they're hard, things are getting better.

Chapter End Notes

grief is it's own form of recovery <3

As always at the second to last chapter, a few...

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

i previously stated that there would be one last encompass main series fic. i lied and wrote another one lol. The series finale is still to come, but before we get to it I have one final mini fic planned.

A fic that focuses on FUNDY!!

More info next update and thanks for the continued support <3

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all lie low

Chapter Summary

Ranboo continues living. It's the bravest thing he can do, and each day it becomes a bit easier.

Chapter Notes

CW: discussion of a past suicide attempt by an off screen character, discussion of self harm, PTSD and related trauma, past medical emergencies, tics, feelings of betrayal, memory loss and issues, flashbacks

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next few months continue to get better. Ranboo has a bit of a panic as the semester wraps up because he's been so focused on his mental health that school has fallen to the wayside.

By a lot.

They may be failing more than half their classes.

The good news is that his university's disability program and support team is incredible and Ranboo is able to scrounge together enough points and credits to pass all of his classes. One is by the skin of his teeth, but he does it.

He doesn't do as well as he knows he could in his classes. He knows he could do better, knows that his grades could have been higher.

But school and university is not meant for people like him- for the disabled- and passing is enough for him. Passing is more than enough for him. He worked so hard to do just that and he won't let people diminish that significance.

Every moment that he doesn't spend catching up on his education he dedicates to supporting a service dog.

From googling breeds, to looking up training methods and programs, to improving his own mental health, to figure out if he can reliably walk, feed, and potty a dog- ranboo works on every skill he could think he would need to care for one.

Slowly, and surely, the skills become more and more natural.

He also has his birthday. Thankfully it occurs after finals and grades otherwise he would even be more stressed and anxious than he already was.

They're not really a fan of big parties, but he lets the Watson's host. It's just the Watson's plus Tubbo and Niki there and it's... it's really nice

Even Techno shows up which is incredibly flattering.

Ranboo tells him that he didn't have to come all this way just for Ranboo's birthday. Techno shrugs and says it wasn't a big deal, he would have done it for any of them.

"But you don't do it for any of them," Ranboo mentions, "you just did it for me."

"I would do it for anyone who needed it," Techno acknowledges, "and I thought you needed it this year."

Oh. Well. Okay.

Techno's a strange guy. Ranboo really loves all the time he gets with him.

But the best part of Ranboo's birthday are the presents.

Usually they're not one for presents. They panic easily and always stress about how to show that they're grateful and being autistic means showing emotions differently and he doesn't want people to think that they don't like what they got them, that they don't appreciate it.

During their time in the foster system Ranboo had always been so scared that if they didn't put in a good enough show, that they didn't look neurotypical enough, he'd get sent off away from Niki.

Birthdays and presents really aren't one of Ranboo's favorite things historically.

But this takes the cake.

It's not a physical present.

Instead, Niki and Phil ask if they can pull him aside for a minute- making sure to soothe his anxiety and say that it's nothing bad, it's about your birthday- and they go out back.

Even with the reassurances that it's not bad, Ranboo still stims anxiously, bouncing his foot, because that's just how he is.

Thankfully Niki and Phil don't seem to mind.

"We thought," Niki says, "that for your birthday, the two of us, we'd pitch in to get you a service dog."

Ranboo blinks.

"We talked to Foolish-"

"You talked to Foolish?" Ranboo asks, feeling just a little bit like their privacy has been invaded. He wouldn't mind if they did talk to their therapist, but they would have appreciated them asking.

"Mhmm," Niki confirms, "I asked you and you said it was okay."

"I did?"

"Yup," she promises, "I'll send you a screenshot of the texts, one sec."

She doesn't need to, Ranboo trusts her, but it's appreciated anyways. Trust is based on proof, trust is earned, and showing evidence for trust when possible is beneficial to long term, lasting, meaningful relationships.

Ranboo's phone vibrates and they look over the texts. Apparently they had given her permission. They appreciate that she had asked before talking to Foolish. It makes him a lot more confident about whatever this is all about.

"Was that okay?" Niki asks. "That we talked to Foolish?"

"I mean, I already said yes," Ranboo says.

"Fair enough, but you know you can always change your mind for the future and stuff, yeah?"

"Yeah I know," Ranboo confirms, "thanks."

They stare at him, expecting something, but Ranboo doesn't know what they're looking for. He chooses to rock on his feet instead.

"So what did you talk to Foolish about?"

Niki blinks and Phil allows a smile to pass his lips.

"Oh," Niki says.

Ranboo looks back and forth at them.

"Oh what?" They ask.

"Niki just told you, you must have forgotten," Phil pitches in, "We're helping you afford a service dog. The lack of any response was confusing us both a bit, that's why Niki said, 'oh,' we were realizing you forgot."

"Oh," Ranboo says, "gotcha."

It takes a minute.

"Wait, wait what- what- you're- I'm- service dog?"

Niki smiles, nodding and the crows feet at Phil's eyes crinkle.

Ranboo laughs in disbelief, hands quickly coming up to flap, entire body vibrating with energy.

"Really?" he asks.

"Really," Phil confirms, "like Niki says we talked to Foolish and you're working so hard on your own health and it would really be so good for you."

"Yeah," Ranboo says, "yeah, yeah it would."

"So," Niki says, "are you ready to get a puppy?"

Yes. Absolutely. Ranboo is absolutely ready.

Unfortunately, it still isn't that easy. But Niki and Phil get him set up and in contact and Ranboo's on some waitlists and this is... it's happening

So much is happening- in a good way.

Ranboo still has bad days. Their birthday was hard and they spent the weekend after battling flashbacks.

The trauma work they've started doing with Foolish is heavy, and it's hard, and they still self harm. But their self harm has reduced significantly since it got bad again and his age regression is continuing to be a safe healthy coping mechanism to pull them out of that space.

Sometimes it's hard for them to talk to Niki, and sometimes they still worry that people will leave them. Ranboo's not sure that any of that is ever going to go away.

But they're in a space where they're consistently dismissing those thoughts, to not giving them more credit than they deserve.

It's good, hard work.

One day, Ranboo even goes to the park an entire twenty minutes away.

Which seems kind of silly that that's an achievement, but it's something he would have never done by himself, on his own terms.

Maybe one day they could walk their dog here.

Ranboo likes planning.

Ranboo likes control.

There's a lot of reasons for it. Most of it boils down to his trauma and his autism. Previously, the uncontrollable had been dangerous, not just unpleasant. Not having control meant that Ranboo could get hurt.

Ranboo doesn't like getting hurt.

So he's avoided situations where he feels like he doesn't have control. The most common example of that is in new, public places. They're so many unknowns and new variables in a new public place.

Throw in sensory issues, need for routine, and fears about masking- combined with memory issues in a foreign situation- and, well, simply put, Ranboo's not really the kind of person to suggest outdoor outings.

When he had lived with the Watson's, he'd gone out more- mostly because Tommy would drag him to the park to meet up with Tubbo.

But Niki was always busy and when she wasn't they stuck mostly to routine and now in university Ranboo had the excuse of simply not having time- even when they do have the time, but rather lack the energy.

So going to the park- going to the park because they want to, because they want to go and see nature and they really do love the little ecosystems that exist around ponds and Ranboo forgot how much they enjoyed feeding ducks.

They don't feed the ducks bread of course, they know better than that.

They wonder where they had learned that. Had they looked it up? Had Niki taught them? Had a foster family?

Ranboo thinks and scatters seed for the ducks and hums and wiggles their toes and exists in nature just as they are.

When they go home, it's with a sense of pride and satisfaction and a determination that they can do hard things.

Ranboo can do hard things. They can get through hard things.

They are resilient, and powerful, and real.

They are here, and they exist, and the world is better for it.

Ranboo wonders when they started crying, and then wonders when they stopped. The only sign that they ever were crying is the stinging on their cheeks. They were good tears, they think.

Yeah, they decide, good tears. Ranboo's okay with crying them.

There's been a lot of crying lately, and Ranboo thinks they're making up slowly for all those years of hurt.

Ranboo's slowly putting the shattered pieces of themselves back together. They don't exactly fit, and many of the pieces are warped beyond repair.

But they don't have to make themselves back in the same way as before.

They make a mosaic of themselves instead, some weird form of a stained glass window that was more beautiful than its original creation.

And Ranboo keeps on living.

Ranboo keeps on going.

Things start to pay off.

Ranboo has more good days than bad and the bad days don't hurt quite as much and when they do Ranboo has skills for them.

And finally, finally, Ranboo's getting a puppy.

A perfect, beautiful, golden retriever puppy that's all his and that he gets to work with alongside a trainer to get to working condition to be his service dog.

And puppy is a light word, considering the dog just turned one and a half, but the dog still has puppy energy, no matter how well behaved she is.

Her name is Allium- her mother was simply 'Flower' and each of the children had been named after different flowers in her honor.

Ranboo could have probably changed her name, but he's been told in most cases it's better not to with dogs this age who need such intense training. Ranboo's more than okay with that.

Allium is a beautiful name.

When they meet, Ranboo falls to pieces and Allium immediately cuddles him, licking at his face encouragingly as her tail wacks the floor.

Ranboo laughs around his tears and hugs her squirming body close.

He gets her a purple collar with small floral white designs to go along with her name. He also puts together a binder of all her training from known commands to current training to future goals. He's bound to forget most of it, so having it on hand until he either remembers or Allium and him are a fluent enough team to not rely on it as heavily would be best.

The work with a trainer through the organization Allium came from and it's a bit hard at first because Ranboo's always anxious around new people but she's literally trained to work with anxious people, and that makes everything so much smoother.

Ranboo learns slowly and Allium does too.

She learns faster than him, but it still isn't quick. She's obviously smart and does so well but these things take time and he doesn't expect her to be perfect immediately.

But she's already providing deep pressure therapy when asked and she's learning all of the signs she needs to alert to and somehow when his memory fails him, she seems to instantly

know, hitting her nose into his hand and looking up at him with deep brown eyes to ground him.

She's perfect.

The first time Ranboo has a breakdown around her she does so much better than he expected. It doesn't help that he's regressed- he's regressed and scared and panicking and caught up in so many bad memories.

Almost immediately there's a wet nose against his arm and they look up to see a puppy.

"Puppy!" they cheer around thick tears. The fluffy face is a welcome comfort in their fear.

Instantly, they throw their arms around the puppy and Allium lets him, coming a bit closer so they don't have to stretch to reach her.

She paws gently at their side and they giggle. They lean into her side, breathing in her fur and letting the texture comfort them.

"Thank you puppy," they say.

A moment later, they speak again.

*Hey puppy?" Ranboo asks, "can I tell you a secret?"

The puppy blinks, and Ranboo gives a solemn nod.

"Of course you can, you're such a good puppy," Ranboo reflects. "Well puppy, I was having some really bad memories. I was little again but body little not just mind little and- and I was at home and I needed to use the potty and I was trying to get in the bathroom but it was locked so I just knocked and called and then no one said anything so I went back to my room and then- and then later Daddy was telling and there were sirens and I still had to go potty but when I went back out there was Mommy and she was lying on the floor and there was a lot of blood and she was in the bathroom.

"And- and I realized that she was in the bathroom earlier when I knocked and- and I told Dad and then he yelled at me and he told me it was my fault because I didn't check well enough and I'm pretty sure he was right because maybe if I had known she was in there I could have told Daddy and then he'd find her before she hurts herself and then none of the bad thing would happen and Mommy and Daddy would both love me- and Niki- and we be happy and okay and I wouldn't have to feel sad ever again. Never ever again."

Allium looks at him with warm brown eyes and readjusts so she can carefully lean her head against his chest. The pressure is nice and makes him hum with pleasure.

He falls asleep in her arms.

When he finally wakes, it's to a mouthful of fur and a well rested body and mind, instead of one fighting exhaustion and nightmares.

"You're such a good girl," Ranboo tells her as he slowly wakes.

They give her long stroking pets and listen to how her tail wacks the bed with a firm, comforting thump.

She noses at him, but doesn't lick. Ranboo's so proud of her. She used to lick him a lot more but they've been training that behavior out due to Ranboo's allergies and she's picked it up so quick.

Ranboo loves everything about her, loves their life with her.

They really do make a good team.

A new idea forms in the back of Ranboo's mind. He begins to plan.

It's no wonder Ranboo ends up back in Hannah's chair.

The outline is ready to go, and places it on Ranboo's wrist with a firm decisiveness, skill built up over years of work. She has Ranboo go to the mirror, inspect the stencil from all angles and turn his arm in all manners to make sure it's what he wants.

It stretches slightly odd near his elbow, so they take it off and do it again, slightly lower.

This time, it lays perfectly.

Ranboo sits, and lets her work, watching as she moves from black, to purple, to greens, and white. Before long, he has a crisp allium on his wrists, each floret beautifully shaded, attention paid to every curve and angle. It sits above his rainbow infinity symbol proudly and the white of his vitiligo starts to creep down at the base of his wrists as if to embrace them both.

Ranboo looks at his skin, from the lack of pigment to the vibrant hues of ink and smiles.

He lets Hannah clean it all up, placing the saniderm down on his wrist to protect it as it heals. He makes a face at the texture and she gives a small laugh and sympathetic smile.

"One week," she encourages, and Ranboo nods. He still doesn't have to like it.

Below him, Allium lifts her head before standing, gives a small nudge at his hip and his hand finds her easily, familiarly, as if she had always been there.

The two of them are intertwined, a person and their dog.

Allium slides seamlessly into Ranboo's life. Which means she also slides seamlessly into Tubbo and Tommy's life, because the three of them are completely intertwined as well.

Tommy takes her for runs and Tubbo trains her in hide and seek.

They're infatuated with her as much as Ranboo is and they respect her just as much.

It's perfect.

"She really does suit you so well," Tommy comments when they're walking home one day, "like- I dunno- hey bitch- your personalities mesh well."

"I'd hope so," Ranboo snorts, "considering I was literally given her because we were supposed to be a 'good match.'"

"Yeah, you are," Tommy confirms, "oh hey- hey bitch-, there's Tubbo."

Ranboo follows Tommy's gaze to where Tubbo is exiting the nearest building. Tommy waves to him, but his head is down, buried in his phone.

Tommy sighs, "let me text him."

Ranboo unclips Allium's leash.

"Go to Tubbo," he encourages. She looks back at him, pausing for confirmation just for a second. "Go on," he insists, "and she's off."

"Or that works too," Tommy comments.

Ranboo chuckles and watches as his dog weaves around students, beelining as best she can for Tubbo. She reaches him in a matter of seconds, shoving her nose into his hands and wagging her tail fiercely.

Tubbo startles a little, but then laughs and gives her pets and praise. He looks up, gaze scanning the areas in front of him, before he finally lands on Tommy and Ranboo. He crouches down, giving Allium more pets and seeming to whisper something in her ear before picking his way back to them.

"Hey," he calls, when he gets close.

"Hi," Ranboo calls back.

"BITCH!" Tommy tics in greeting.

Tubbo's face scrunches ever so slightly, and he makes the last few steps to them.

"Come again?" he asks.

Allium leaves Tubbo's side, returning once more to Ranboo, and Ranboo quickly clips her leash back on. She doesn't need it, but Ranboo feels better with the line of security. They're both still learning after all.

"I said hi," Ranboo offers.

"I called you a bitch- BITCH," Tommy adds on.

"Oh I heard that part," Tubbo says, "your loudass is even enough for me to hear. It's also great at drowning out anything Ranboo even attempts to say."

"I mean my voice is more important anyways," Tommy teases, "Just get better ears." Tubbo flicks his head and Tommy tries to kick him back. Ranboo rolls his eyes and shoves his way between the two of them.

Tomy frowns good-naturedly before breaking away and starting down on their previous path.

Tubbo takes advantage of the moment to flip Tommy off when he can't see it.

Ranboo chuckles, covering his mouth as Tommy turns back, glaring suspiciously at Tubbo.

Tubbo gives him a warm smile, and Tommy can't help but copy, shaking his head.

Ranboo's friends are smiling and it's so silly but Ranboo looks down and he swears even Allium is smiling too.

With little will to fight it, Ranboo smiles as well.

Things aren't perfect and they aren't fixed. Ranboo's trauma isn't cured and it won't ever fully go away.

But he's learning the skills to cope with his trauma and he has resources like his friend, his therapists, and his service dog to lean on when he needs them.

Really, with a support system like this, what more could any one person need?

What more could any one person want?

Chapter End Notes

and once again, we come to an end. allium has been an amazing journey and thank you all for sticking around to the trilogy's end. encompass is filled with my love and im so happy to share it with you all.

As always, fic announcements and housekeepings

FUNDY'S FIC is next!

-ill be taking a standard two week break

-title: it's fun to be a fungi

-focuses on fundy growing up and his relationships with words

-fundy's name is a play on words and fundy has a WHOLE lot to say

-key words: non-speaking autistic fundy!

I also posted a new chapter to encompass q&a so feel free to check that out

keep your eyes peeled for a new side fic focused on the foster case overviews of all the encompass characters

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

[Encompass Sandbox Project](#): The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

[encompass: the sandbox](#): encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

[encompass: behind the scenes](#): an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

Works inspired by this one

[the color wheel](#) by [BlackPlasticRoses](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!